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Women of India

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Raja Ram Mohan Roy
Father of social reform in India

WOMEN OF INDIA

Foreword by

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FOREWORD

I have not yet read this book as a whole, but I have looked through many of the pages in proof and I have noted with pleasure and surprise the comprehensive manner in which this subject has been treated. It is never easy, and seldom successful, for a number of authors to combine to produce a book. In the present case, however, I think that these difficulties have been overcome and something has been produced which is worth while, instructive and a pleasure to read.

This book had to be written. It may be the forerunner of other and fuller treatments of this subject. But even as it is, it gives us a broad survey which, I think, is of great importance. There are two views, among others, about Indian women. One is the typical old Indian viewpoint of the Indian woman being a symbol of purity, faithfulness and submission and devotion to her husband. The great symbols are Sita and Savitri. The other view, mostly to be found in some Western countries, is that the Indian woman is backward, suppressed and treated almost as a chattel. Both these views are far from the truth and deal with some imaginary conceptions little related to life, for life is much more complicated and these simple definitions do not give us much insight into its working. I suppose that none of us can be truly objective in discussing a subject of this kind. In a country like India, with it enormous variety, it is easy to pick up some one aspect here and there and generalize from it. So we can indulge in praise of the women of India and find many examples to justify our praise. We can also condemn their position in Indian life and also find examples to justify this. For my part, I am partial to the women of India, and the more I have wandered about this great country the more I have felt a certain pride in our womenfolk.

Women in India, as these pages will show, have played an important part in our social life and in our history. They

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have played this part in every branch of national activity, from high learning to valour on the battlefield. But it is their unobtrusive work in the household, in the village or in the larger community, that has moulded the nation.

They are essentially feminine, and that is as it should be. But then I have always felt that India, for all her manly qualities, is especially noted for the feminine virtues—gentleness, tenderness, a certain patient resignation and a quiet and sometimes amazing courage of a somewhat passive kind. I say this realising that I am generalizing when I should not do so, because there are all kinds of men as well as all kinds of women in this country. But I suppose it is true that the idea of women in India is chiefly connected with these feminine virtues as well as, perhaps, with some feminine failings. Long ago, our ancient law-giver, Manu, descending from the high level of the law, advised as to what the names of women should be. He said: "Let the names of women be good to pronounce—sweet, simple, pleasant and appropriate; let them terminate in long vowels and resemble words of benediction." Thousands of years have moulded and conditioned our race. Today we pass rapidly through various phases of transition. That is inevitable and not to be regretted. But I doubt if all these coming changes, big as they are, will uproot us from our old foundations. Someone said about another country words which may be applied to India: "She lives in her own time, in the rhythm of her own history, which does not quite keep time with the clocks of the twentieth century".

Yet the twentieth century is upon us, with all its destruction of the old and hopes and fears of the future. We live in the India simultaneously in almost all the ages and centuries that have preceded this middle of the twentieth century. We are busy co-ordinating them and trying to fit them into each other, to keep the old roots and to have fresh branches and fruit and flowers in this present-day world of ours. The rhythm of our time is an ever-changing one. The clock ticks on often leaving our thinking and our policies behind.

We talk of revolutions, political and economic. And yet the greatest revolution in a country is the one that affects the

status and living conditions of its women. It is in so far as our revolution has affected our women that it is basic. I believe it has done so, not perhaps in a dramatic and aggressive way but rather after the old Indian fashion of combining change with continuity. And yet there have been many dramatic phases of this change even in our time. It was Gandhiji, that wonderful man and great revolutionary, who brought a dramatic change among our women, when at his bidding they came out in large numbers from the shelter of their homes to take their part in the struggle for India's freedom. Once the old shackles were removed, it was no longer possible to replace them in the same way. Attempts were no doubt made to go back, but they were bound to fail.

Now the full impact of modern life is being felt by our women-folk in the cities chiefly and in our schools and colleges. I do not know what the final outcome will be, except that it will be different from the past, though perhaps not so different as to affect the essential characteristics of India's women. This book shows how women are playing their part in a multitude of activities and doing well. There is no doubt in my mind about their capacity and now that opportunities are coming their way an increasing number of them will make good.

A Frenchman once wrote that the best way to judge the position of a nation was to find out the status of its women. I think this is correct. In spite of many brilliant examples in the past, I think it would be true to say that the position and status of women in India for many hundreds of years has not been a good one, in law or in public or social life. In recent years they have made good politically and in other departments of human activity. And now I am happy that some of the recent legislation we have passed in our Parliament has rid them of many legal shackles and thus helped to raise their status. They have many hurdles yet to overcome. But they have been given the opportunity to develop according to their own ability and genius. I have no doubt that many of them will take advantage of these new opportunities and thus demonstrate afresh their inner worth.

To those who live in India and, therefore, come in contact with Indian women, this book will bring much information which will enlighten their minds and give them more correct information of what our women have done and are doing. To those chiefly abroad, this book will be even more useful as presenting a picture not only of the past but of the changing present in India.

New Delhi,
October 2, 1957.

Jawaharlal Nehru

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WOMEN IN ANCIENT INDIA

Radha Kumud Mookerji

There is a widespread misconception regarding the true status of woman in ancient Indian society. It is mainly due to deplorable ignorance of the original Sanskrit texts, both *Sruti* and *Smriti*, in which are to be found the laws, customs and traditions which define the true status of women in early times.

The most authoritative text on the subject is the *Rigveda*, the primary root from which sprang all the later developments of Hinduism, its many sects, schools and religious systems. As a matter of fact, the *Rigveda* contains the seeds and sources from which the entire course of Hindu thought through the ages has been derived and flowed in so many streams. It is the Tree of Knowledge out of which have grown so many offshoots and branches representing the various aspects of Hindu civilization.

The *Rigveda* shows abundant evidence pointing to the fact that women were fully the equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma. It may be noted that the *Rigveda* is a product of the highest religious thought, which dawned on the saints and seers as a result of their contemplation in a life of complete asceticism and penance. It was to such meditative master-minds that Truth revealed itself. They gave expression to the Truth thus revealed in impassioned prayers called *suktas*. The entire *Rigveda* is made up of such *suktas* and hymns. They were uttered in ecstasy by these seers, aptly called *rishis*, who were capable of a direct vision of Truth and represented the highest degree of spiritual enlightenment.

The hymns of the *rishis* were inspired and not ordinary secular compositions. Every hymn of the *Rigveda* is attributed to a *rishi*. Though the majority of these hymns were the work of male *ri his*, the *Rigveda* contains hymns which

were revealed by women seers also. The latter were called *rishikas* and *brahmavadinis*. The *Rigveda* speaks of the following *rishikas*, *viz*, (1) Romasa [i, 126, 7], (2) Lopamudra [i, 179, 1—6], (3) Apata [viii, 91, 1—7], (4) Kadru [ii, 6, 8], (5) Visvavara [v, 28, 3], and several others mentioned in the tenth *mandala* such as : (6) Ghosha, (7) Juhu, (8) Vagambhrini, (9) Paulomi, (10) Jarita, (11) Sraddha-Kamayani, (12) Urvasi, (13) Sarnga, (14) Yami, (15) Indrani, (16) Savitri and (17) Devayani. The *Samaveda* adds the following, *viz*,(18) Nodha [Purvarchchika xii, 1], (19) Akrishtabhasha,(20)Sikatanivavari [Uttararchchika, i, 4] and (21) Ganpayana [ib, xxii, 4].

The *brahmavadinis* were products of the educational discipline of *brahmacharya*, for which women also were eligible. The *Rigveda* (v, 7, 9) refers to young maidens completing their Education as *brahmacharinis* and then gaining husbands, in whom they are merged like rivers in the oceans. Rv. iii (55, 16) mentions unmarried learned and young daughters who should be married to learned bridegrooms. The *Yajurveda* (viii, 1) similarly states that a daughter who has completed her *brahmacharya* should be married to one who is learned like her. The *Atharvaveda* (xi, 6) also refers to maidens qualifying by *brahmacharya*, the disciplined life of studentship, for married life in the second *asrama* (*brahmacharyena kanya yuvnam vindak patim*).

HIGHEST SOCIAL STATUS

It is, therefore, no wonder that the wife enjoyed with her husband full religious rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies with him. In fact, the performance of such ceremonies would be invalid without the wife joining her husband as his full partner. Thus the *Rigveda* accorded the highest social status to the qualified women of those days.

The *Rigveda* lays down the norm, the ideal and the tradition which were followed as law in later times. The *Upanishads* exhibit fully the continuance of this tradition. They tell of a learned conference of philosophers—the earliest conference of its kind in the world—which was convened at his court by

Rajarshi (philosopher-king) Janaka of Videha. The royal invitation was sent to all the philosophers of those days. In view of the many different schools of philosophy that had grown up in the country, with their different religious doctrines and practices, King Janaka thought that it was time to codify the floating mass of philosophical speculation into a regular and scientific system. The conference adopted a proper procedure by which its discussions could be regulated and made fruitful in results. The procedure was that the exponents and representatives of the different schools of philosophy should take a prominent part in the discussions so that each might expound the special doctrines of his school. Among these participants are mentioned eight principal philosophers, their names being Uddalaka Aruni, Asvala, Artabhaga, Bhujyu, Ushasta, Kahoda, Vidagdha Sakalya and the woman philosopher, *Brahmavadini* Gargi Vachaknavi.

The last named was a conspicuous figure at the conference. She came forward boldly to cross lances in argument with the male philosophers. A position of authority was assumed by *Rishi* Yajnavalkya, who was therefore a target of attack by Gargi. She began by saying : "As a heroic youth from Kasi or Videha bends his unbent bow and takes two deadly arrows in his hand, I have armed myself against thee with two questions, which solve for me."

Not less bold and piercing was the thrust by another opponent : "When anyone says 'that is an ox, that is a horse', it is thereby pointed out. Point out to me the revealed, unveiled, Brahma, the Atman which dwells in everything. What is that O Yajnavalkya ?" The character of these questions shows the high degree of the realization of Truth aimed at by these seers.

GARGI'S ADMISSION

At the end of the conference, after Yajnavalkya had satisfactorily answered the challenge and the questions of Gargi, she made the following admission : "Venerable sages, you

may consider it a good thing if you can now get off by simply bowing before him. No one, I am sure, can ever dream of defeating him in any argument concerning Brahman."

As the story goes, on this public proclamation of the philosophical superiority of Yajnavalkya as *anuchanatama*, King Janaka awarded him a prize of 1,000 cows, from each of whose horns was hung five gold pieces (*suvarna*). Thus Yajnavalkya obtained a total of 10,000 gold pieces.

The *Upanishads* throw further light on the intellectual life of the times, in which men and women were equal participants. According to the story, King Janaka, after receiving instruction from Yajnavalkya as his guru (teacher), offered him his *gurudakshina* in these words: "Sir, I give you the Videhas and also myself to be together your slaves" (*So'ham Bhagavate Videhan* dadami mam chapi saha dasyayeti*) [iv, 4, 16]. The *rishi*, then at the height of his power, prosperity, name and fame, chose that moment to decline the gift of a kingdom, and even to renounce the little property he had, to retire at once 'from home into homelessness' in the forest and devote himself to a total quest of Truth. He called on his wife Maitreyi to take leave of her after making provision for her living. The wise wife at once confronted her husband with the question: "My Lord, if this whole earth full of wealth (*sarva prithivi vittena purna*) belonged to me, tell me, should I be immortal with it or no ?" (*tenamrita syamiti tena prithivipuranavittasadhyena karmanagnihotradina amrita kim syamiti*) [Sankara]. "No", replied Yajnavalkya, "like the wife of a rich man will be thy life. But there is no hope (*asa*) of immortality (*amritatva*) by wealth. Wealth is only a means to happiness and enjoyment of pleasures' (*sukhopayabhogasampannam*, as explained by Sankara). Then Maitreyi said: "What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal ? " And so husband and wife joined together in a common renunciation and pursuit of Truth.

Rigvedic society was based on monogamy and was patriarchal. The marriage hymn (x, 85) points to the practice of the bridegroom going to the bride's house, where he marries her, and whence, after the marriage, he conveys the bride to

**Videhan—Videhan desan mama rajyam samastam dadami* (Sankara).

his own house. In that new home, she has an honoured place as mistress of the household, looking after her aged father-in-law, mother-in-law and her husband's brother and sisters. The hymn also indicates that marriage was a sacrament and indissoluble, hence widows were not remarried. The wife took part with her husband in his religious ceremonies (viii, 31). If a girl's parents died, her brothers looked after her. The institution of monogamy is itself eloquent recognition of the high social status of women.

BIFURCATION OF STUDIES

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (vi, 4, 17) mentions a ritual by which a person prays for the birth to him of a daughter who should be a *pandita* or learned lady. The *Kaushitaki Brahmana* (vii, 6) tells of an Aryan lady, Pathyasvasti, proceeding to the North for study and obtaining by her study the title of *vak*, i.e., Sarasvati goddess. In this connection, it may be noted that even in those early days there was sometimes a bifurcation of studies as between men and women. Women were taught some of the fine arts, like singing and dancing, which were regarded as accomplishments unfit for men (*Taittiriya Samhita* vi, 1, 6, 5 ; *Maitra. Sam* iii, 7,3; *Satapatha Br.* iii, 2, 4, 3—6).

The Vedic tradition continued in later Vedic times. The *Brihat-devta* calls Rigvedic female *rishis* such as Ghosha, Romasa, Lopamudra and Visvavara *brahmavadinis*. Some of the *smriti* texts understand by *brahmabavadini a kumari* (girl) who does not marry. Harita (xxi, 23) says: "Women are of two classes: (1) *brahmavadini* and (2) *sadyovadhu*. The former is eligible for *upanayana*, Veda-study, and other ceremonies, including the practice of begging within the household. The *Sadyovadhu* has only to perform the *upanayana* in some form before she is married." Yama also says: "In times of yore, girls were eligible for (1) *maunjibandhana* i.e., *upanayana*, (2) study of Veda and (3) *savitrivachana*, exposition of the highest type of Mantra or Knowledge".

The *Srauta* and *Girhya-sutras* mention how the wife uttered Vedic *mantras* (prayers) as an equal with the husband at religious ceremonies (e.g. *Asalayana Sr. S.*, I, 11, etc). Gobhila (*Gr. S.*, 1, 3) states that the wife must be educated enough to be able to take part in Vedic ceremonies of mystical significance (*nalu khalu anadhita saknoti patni hotumiti* : 'the illiterate wife is unworthy of a husband'). Chapter I of Jaimini's *Purva-mimamsa* is interpreted by Sabara Svami as dealing with the equal rights of men and women to the performance of the highest religious ceremonies. Hemadri refers to educated *kumaris* or girls as *vidushis* who should be married to equally learned husbands called *manishis*.

The great grammarian, Panini, who lived before 500 B.C., in his work named *Ashtadhvavi* cites illustrations of his grammatical rules to show how women were going in for regular Vedic studies like men. Thus the formation *kathi* means a female student of the *Katha Sakha* of the Veda in that particular rescension (iv, 1, 63). Similarly, the term *bahvrichi* means a female student who is well versed in many hymns, i.e., the *Rigveda*.

Learned ladies of those days naturally figured and functioned as teachers. Katyayana, the commentator on Panini, (iv, 1, 46), applies the epithets *adhvapika*, *upadhyavi*, *upadhvava* or *acharya* to them.

Some grammatical passages show that women had other careers open to them apart from a mere literary career. The great grammarian, Patanjali, author of that monumental masterpiece known as *Mahabhashya*, uses the formation *saktiki* to indicate a female bearer of a spear [iv, 1, 15 (6)]. In this connection, we are reminded of the Amazonian bodyguard of armed women employed in his palace by the Emperor Chandragupta Maurya as described by Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador to his Court. Similarly, Kautilya in his *Arthasastra*, which is also taken to be a document of Mauryan history, refers to women soldiers armed with bows and arrows (*striganaih dhanvibhih*). Lastly, it may be noted that there is a sculpture at Bharhut of about the 2nd century B.C. which represents a woman carrying a standard on horseback as belonging to the vanguard of the cavalry.

BUDDHIST WOMEN

Buddhism kept up the traditions of Brahmanical religion in according to womanhood an honoured place in social life. Women were made eligible for admission to what was known as the *Bhikshuni-Sangha*, the Order of Nuns, which opened to them avenues of culture and social service and ample opportunities for public life. The young Buddhist Church of those early days was also able to attract the sympathy and generosity of many a lay lady. The munificence of the matron Visakha is equalled only by that of the merchant prince Anathapindika. Visakha was the head of an illustrious band which included names like Ambapali of Vaisali and Suppiya of Banaras. The Buddha fully appreciated the hospitality and offers of financial support from individual women of sincere religious devotion.

But apart from these remarkable characters among Buddhist lay women, the Order of Nuns was the nursery which produced many learned women, some of whom became teachers of junior nuns on account of proficiency in the sacred texts. For instance, *Chullavagga* (x, 8) mentions that a *bhikkhuni* was the pupil of another *bhikkhuni* named Uppalavanna.

Some Buddhist nuns achieved great distinction by the prominent part they took in the work of the early Buddhist Reformation. In the commentary called *Manorathapurani* of Buddhaghosha on the *Anguttara Nikaya* there is an interesting chapter concerning those ladies whom the Buddha regarded as his chief disciples. Among them were several who entered the Order and were known as *theris*. Thirteen such *theris* were specially mentioned by the Buddha for their spiritual merit. The most distinguished of them was Dhammadinna. Her husband, on renouncing the world, offered her untold wealth. She proudly declined and herself took to religious life, later becoming a teacher. It is stated that she attained such spiritual wisdom that her instruction was sought by her husband himself. She would solve difficult metaphysical questions with the ease of "one who severs the stalk of a lotus with the sword".

Some of these women leaders of the Buddhist Reformation are mentioned in the commentary of Dharmapala on the *Theri-gatha*. They are (i) Soma, whom the Buddha converted at Rajagriha; (ii) Anupama of peerless beauty, daughter of wealthy parents who, "cutting off the glory of her hair, entered on the lonely paths of life and wandered forth to lose the sense of home"; (iii) Queen Khema; (iv) Sujata, the wife of a wealthy citizen who in the quest for Truth renounced worldly happiness; (v) Chapa, who by her conduct drove her husband to be a monk till she herself, chastened by the separation, followed her husband to the Order; (vi) Kisagautami, whom the Buddha found to be fit enough for appointment as Superintendent of the Convent at Jetavana; and (vii) Sundari, a beautiful heiress, who renounced the world on her brother's death.

Some of these *theris*, after attaining enlightenment, took to missionary work for their faith.

The most renowned of these women leaders was Patachara, the bereaved mother who gave solace to 500 other bereaved mothers. One day, as they were having a meal, a wretched woman approached them for alms, a homeless, childless widow disowned by her people on account of an infectious disease. Immediately the Sisters of Mercy, "the saviours and good shepherds of the heedless and the lost", adopted her as one of their own. Some of these nuns are mentioned as being successful speakers and preachers, for example Sukka, to hear whom people flocked.

It will be apparent from these examples that the Buddhist convents opened out to women opportunities for education, self-culture and varied spheres of social service, in which they made themselves the equals of men, supplementing their work in the spread of their faith.

Let us now, under Free Republican India and a Constitution which guarantees equality of opportunity to all its citizens, irrespective of caste, creed or sex, recapture some of these forgotten ideals of ancient Indian womanhood and revive the institutions for social service and spiritual ministration, so that they may fulfil their special mission in applying their healing and human touch to suffering mankind.

Terracotta Mother Goddess from Mohenjo-daro, c. 2500 B.C.

Mother and Child—Pala sculpture, c. 10th century A.D.

Sculpture of a princess, Gwalior, late medieval period

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

K. M. Panikkar

The period from the invasion of India by Mohammed of Ghor to the establishment of British authority in Bengal in the second half of the 18th century witnessed in general a deterioration of the position of women in India.

Over the whole of the Gangetic Valley social conditions remained unsettled for nearly 300 years—in fact till the time of the Great Moghuls. The breakdown of social institutions, which is unavoidable during periods of continuous invasion, the upsetting of traditional political structures, the vast migrations of people and the economic depression which follows prolonged unsettlement—all these must have contributed to a general depression of social life, especially among women, during the centuries of conquest. Rigorous seclusion of women became the rule, as a result both of the imitation of the system of *purdah* which the Muslims enforced and of a sense of fear arising from the lack of general security. The facilities of education which the Buddhist nunneries had provided vanished with the total disappearance of convents and monasteries. No longer were *parivarajikas*, wandering nuns who had access equally to palaces and huts, a feature of Indian society.

With the 15th century the situation underwent a change. The general revival of Hindu life which the period witnessed also led to a considerable improvement in the status of women.

Conditions in South India were of course different. As society was much more settled and was not subjected to the pressure of continuous invasion, the position of women underwent no serious deterioration. Education was fairly widespread as the number of women poets both in the regional languages and in Sanskrit clearly proves. Ganga Devi, author of the epic *Madhura Vijayam* (14th century) who was wife of Vira Kampa Raya, and Tirumalamba Devi, author of *Varadambika Parinayam*, are but two of the many poets whose

names have come down to us. Vajji, the Karnataka poetess, even exclaimed in a verse that the author who described Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, as being of fair colour did not evidently know that she (Vajji) was dark. ! While it may be argued that popular devotional poetry in regional languages may not necessarily indicate a high standard of education, it is obvious that works in classical Sanskrit could only be the result of a systematic and sustained study of the classics. In a 15th century Malayalam work entitled *Chandrotsavam* there is a passage which gives the general reading of educated women and this includes *Sukuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram* and other Sanskrit dramas. Till the end of our period this tradition continued, for we have at the end of the 18th century the case of Manorama Thampurathi of Calicut, who was known by the name of Manorama because of her proficiency in *Proudha Manorama*, the classical work on Sanskrit grammar. Two generations of Sanskrit scholars in Kerala were her disciples.

WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

In the field of administration Indian women produced some notable figures during this period. There was Rudramaba, the Kakateya queen of whom Marco Polo speaks; Rezia Begum (13th century) of whom it was said that her one weakness was that she was a woman; Chandbibi, who appeared on the ramparts of the fort of Ahmadnagar dressed in male attire and put heart in the defenders of that town against the prowess of Akbar himself; Tarabai, the Maharatta heroine who was the life and soul of Maharatta resistance during the last determined onslaught of Aurangzeb; Mangammal, whose benign rule is still a green memory in the South, and Ahalyabai Holkar, to whose administrative genius Sir John Malcolm has paid a magnificent tribute. These are but a few outstanding names among the great women that India can boast of during this period. The Moghul princesses of course played a notable part in the court life of Agra and Delhi. Jehanara, the partisan

of Dara Shikoh, Roshanara, the partisan of Aurangzeb, Zebun-nissa, the daughter of Aurangzeb, whose poems (under the pen name of Makhfi) have come down to us, and others represented the culture of the court.

But the general state of Indian womanhood cannot well be judged from the lives of queens and princesses. Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji, is more typical of Indian womanhood than the bejewelled princesses who wrote poetry, played within the walls of their palaces or administered states. She was a truer type of Indian womanhood, a devoted mother, strong willed and autocratic at home but wholly subordinating herself to the interests of her son.

We may now consider the social conditions of India during the period as they affected Indian women. We have already noted that, at least in North India, the seclusion of women had become the rule among the higher classes. There is evidence to show that such seclusion, at least among kings and nobles, was practised even in earlier days. The *avarodha* women of the court in ancient times had generally been in *purdah*, at least in the North; but the practice was not widely prevalent. In the *Kathasarit Sagara* (11th century) there is a remarkable statement about this custom by a princess, Ratnaprabha, which I quote here: "I consider that the strict seclusion of women is a mere social custom, or rather a folly, produced by jealousy. It is of no use whatever. Women of good family are guarded by their own virtue as by their only chamberlain. Even God himself can scarcely guard the unchaste."

Even after seclusion of women had become more strict among the higher classes, there is no reason to think that the generality of women in the villages observed *purdah*. Among the cultivating classes especially the system was certainly not in vogue even among the Hindus of North India.

Polygamy was of course legal and permissible, but outside the princely and noble classes and certain very orthodox castes like the Kulin Brahmins of Bengal it was not a widely prevalent custom.

THE SATI QUESTION

A more interesting question is that of *sati.* It is commonly held by European writers that, before the custom was abolished by law by Lord William Bentinck, Indian women immolated themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. The custom undoubtedly is very ancient in royal families, though even among kings it was not usual practice for wives to mount the funeral pyre. In the *Mahabharata* we have mention of one of the two wives of Pandu performing *sati*, but it is significant that the custom was not followed by Dasaratha's wives. In South India the practice was practically unknown, and in North India among the common people there was never any question of *sati.* How prevalent was it among the princely and noble families during our period ? A distinguished English Observer, writing in 1808, remarked that though he had lived in India for many years and travelled extensively he had not come across a single case of *sati.* Undoubtedly it was practised in royal families and in rare cases among others who considered themselves superior, but the idea that *sati* was generally practised among Hindu women during this period is altogether unhistorical.

Among what may be called the Brahmanical classes child marriage was the norm; but even here there were notable exceptions. Among the Nambudiri Brahmans of Kerala and among the Kashmiris the practice of pre-puberty marriage was not prevalent at any time. Among the Kshatriya families also it was not considered necessary to have marriages performed before puberty. With the common people, of course, it was never the case. It was therefore only a small section of people that followed this custom which came for some reason to be considered a special characteristic of Hindu life.

The legal position of Hindu women—especially from the point of view of inheritance—was again, generally speaking, unsatisfactory. Though the doctrine of *stridhana* (or women's property) was liberally interpreted under some schools of Hindu law, women were generally excluded from succession to property and this led to their dependence on men. But

Sculpture of a huntress from the 12th century temple at Halebid, Mysore State

Moghul princess and her female retinue falcon hunting—17th century

Court musicians — a Pahari painting, late 12th century

The Empress Nur Jehan—a Moghul miniature

Lovers in a grove—a Rajasthani painting, 1750 A.D.

in estimating the effect of this economic factor the significance of the Hindu joint family has to be kept in mind. In the circumstances of the time, the joint family was a source of great strength to women. It was a woman's realm in many ways, and considerable mitigation of the effects of the system of social seclusion, economic dependence and lack of facilities for school education was provided by this institution.

In sum, it can be said that while in the earlier period of Muslim invasions the position of Indian women in Northern India tended to deteriorate, in the period immediately following there was sufficient social integration which enabled Indian womanhood to retrieve some of the position which it had lost. In the area south of the Vindhyas the evolution of social life was more normal, and consequently, in almost every field, South India produced women of note. The weakness of Indian womanhood during the period arose from the fact that there was no central direction to social thinking and there was no machinery like organized public opinion for giving effect to essential reforms. Social customs, therefore, undoubtedly tended to stagnate, a factor accelerated by the breakdown of settled government with the decline of Moghul power.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

The advent of the British marked an entirely new phase in Indian society. The old order had already undergone many changes under the blows of constant invasions and the conflicts that followed. But the British conquest of India paralysed the country both because of a ruthless colonialism and because the new culture was so alien.

The economic factor was perhaps the most decisive. The destruction of hand industries struck the deadliest blow. Large numbers of women lost their only means of livelihood, and were rendered destitute. When the old economic order was swept away, with it went the barter system, one of the mainstays of the tiller and the artisan.

Under these circumstances, the cultural collapse of Indian society was inevitable. Violence was used against it—the consequent decline of arts and crafts meant not only economic but cultural ruin, as the early records of the East India Company show. It deprived the nation of its natural mode of self-expression and did much emotional and spiritual injury. Fortunately, Indian culture does not rest only in books, but is deeply embedded in the hearts of the people. Women have always been the repositories of this culture and they kept it alive in song, dance and story through more than 200 years of British rule.

The economic structure established by the British was not devised out of the needs of the country or in the interests of the people. It was primarily meant to exploit Indian resources for the profit of the ruling class. Other factors followed in the wake of this. The introduction of a new system of education through English created a wide gap between the few fortunate onces who could take advantage of it and the general masses to whom it was denied.

Nevertheless, the women of the middle classes began gradually to adjust themselves to this new world, for they

did not wish to remain for ever isolated and away from the main stream of national life. Slowly, though in small numbers, women took to the new education. As far back as 1878, we find Indian girls studying in Universities and, a decade later, voyaging to far-off countries, even America. Medicine and even law attracted women in that age. In 1888, for the first time an Indian woman went abroad to study medicine, and for the first time one of them took the Bachelor of Civil Law course at Oxford in 1892. Provision for higher education for women was slow and halting, for it was not favoured by the conservative British, who were still imposing a great many restrictions on women in their own country and naturally had no intention of promoting such progressive measures in their colonies.

Fortunately, Indians have too ancient a civilization to remain impassive where education is concerned. A great many associations were formed to promote and care for general education, and women's education in particular. All the noted social reformers lent their weight. Outstanding women like* Smt. Ramabai Ranade, Pandita Ramabai, Smt. P. K. Ray, Lady Bose, Bhicaiji Cama and Shirin Cursetji dedicated themselves to opening new opportunities and careers for women.

All-India conferences of women seem to have been in vogue practically since the birth of the Indian National Congress, though in the earlier days they were not organized on a regular basis.

MIGHTY AWAKENING

The various socio-religious reform movements, such as the Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, gave added impetus to this awakening. All this activity was obviously not the result of literary education, which was still very scarce and slow, but definitely a reflection of the mood of those times, the mighty awakening that was sweeping the country, infusing a new

*Shrimati, abbreviated Smt., is equivalent to Mrs. The term for Mr. is Shri.

breath into the deadened old limbs and stirring lethargy into action.

The world was in a process of contraction. Easier means of travel brought contact with foreigners, new ideas came in through papers, journals and books. This new impact enthused the women. It was the period of the pioneers, who out a pathway through the dark and solitary forests of ignorance, prejudice, conservatism, sometimes with torn hearts and bleeding feet. Men and women of indomitable courage wrote the first letters on India's new page. Women's progress was as much helped on by sympathetic men as by adventurous, spirited women.

The first modern organization of women was started in 1917 by the great pioneering woman, Mrs. Margaret Cousins, in Madras under the inspiration and leadership of that magnetic personality, Mrs. Annie Besant, and her Home Rule Movement, which was then a dynamic stream giving expression to the people's restless urge for freedom. Mrs. Besant was interned by the British Indian Government as a result of this agitation, and that gave added inspiration to women.

The Women's Indian Association, though functioning mainly in the South, became from its very inception a rallying point for women for action on an all-India plane. One of its first ventures was to lead a women's deputation to Mr. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India touring this country in 1919 to formulate political reforms to meet the rising demands of India. The first world war, then raging, had lent urgency to the situation. Indian women demanded the franchise and the right to participate in the political life of the country. The deputation was led by Sarojini Naidu.

A decade later, the Women's Indian Association took the initiative in launching the All-India Women's Conference, the first mass Indian women's organization to come into being. At first it sought to concentrate its attention largely on the question of education, especially of women.

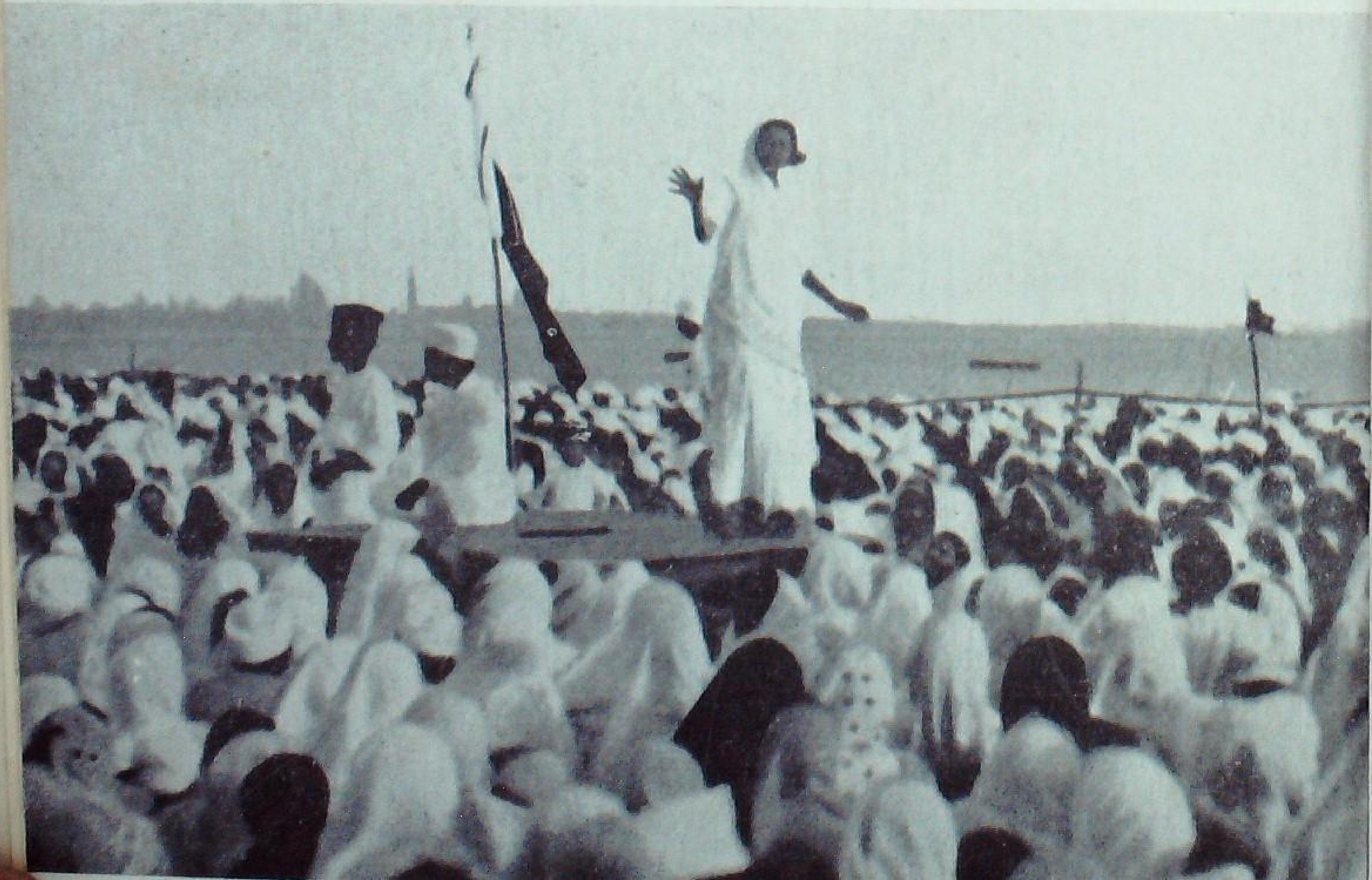
DENIAL OF FRANCHISE

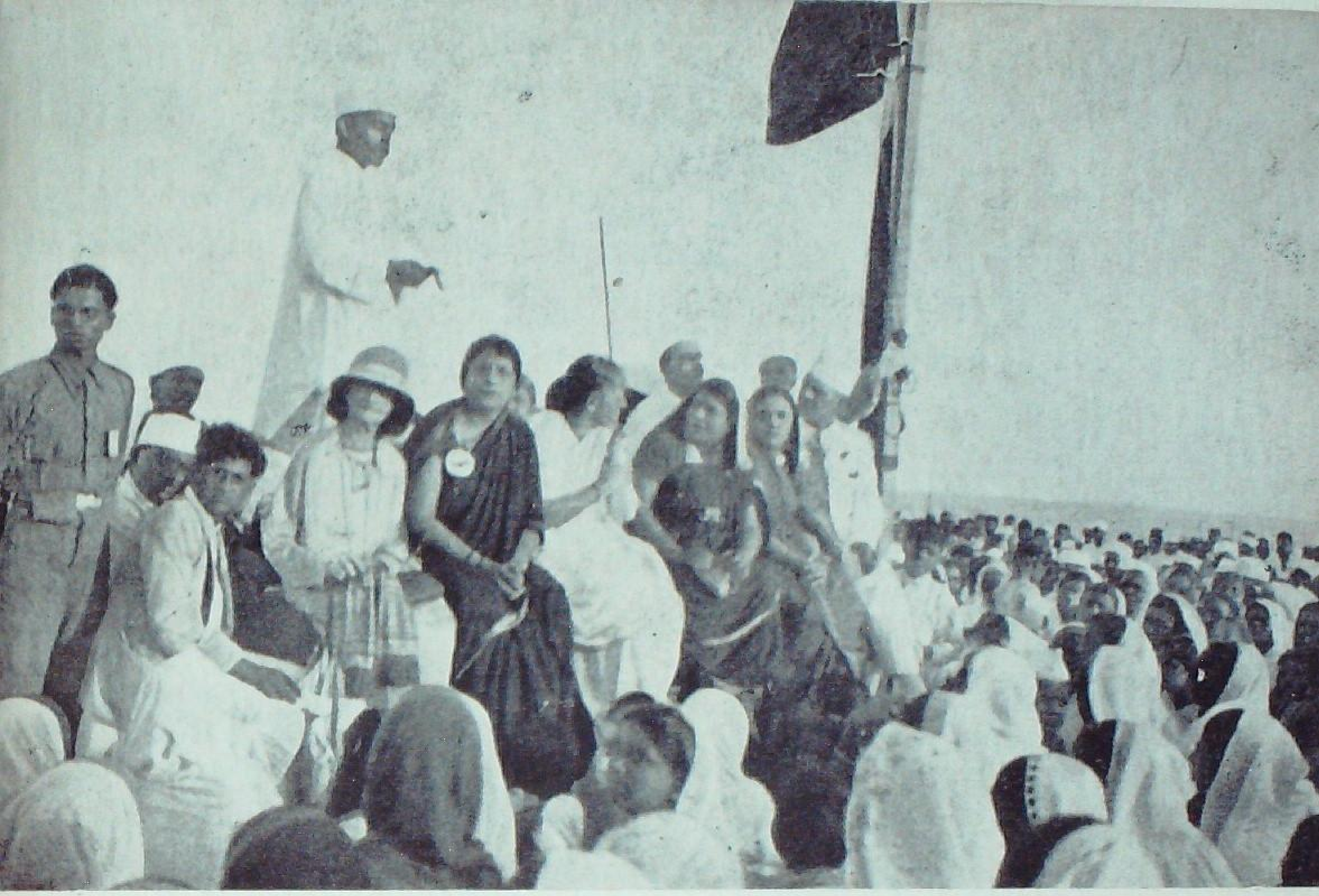
The All-India Women's Conference soon found that it could not confine itself to education and social reform only,

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, who fought the British in the 1857 Struggle

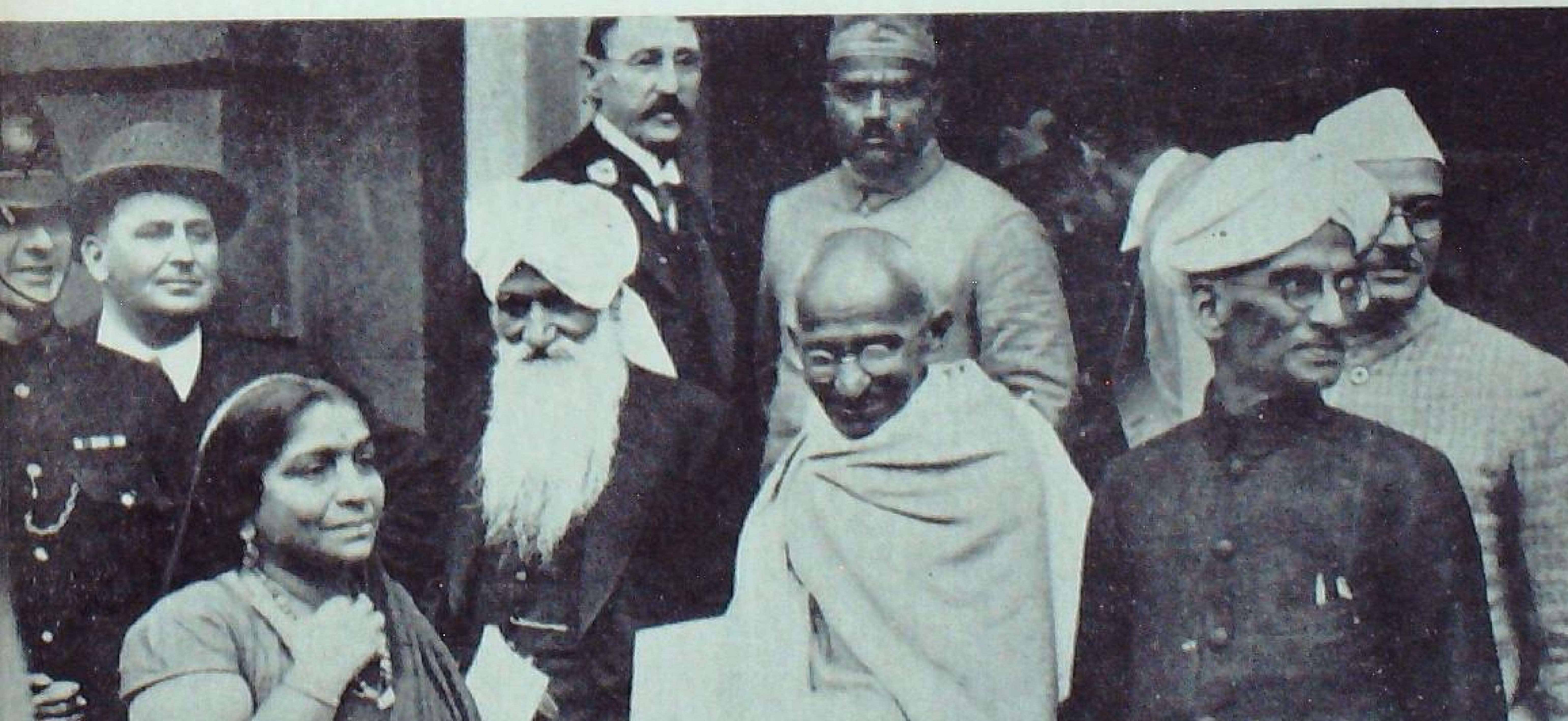
Sarojini Naidu leading the famous Salt March at Dharasana in 1930

Perin Captain addressing a political meeting on Chowpatty Beach at Bombay in 1930

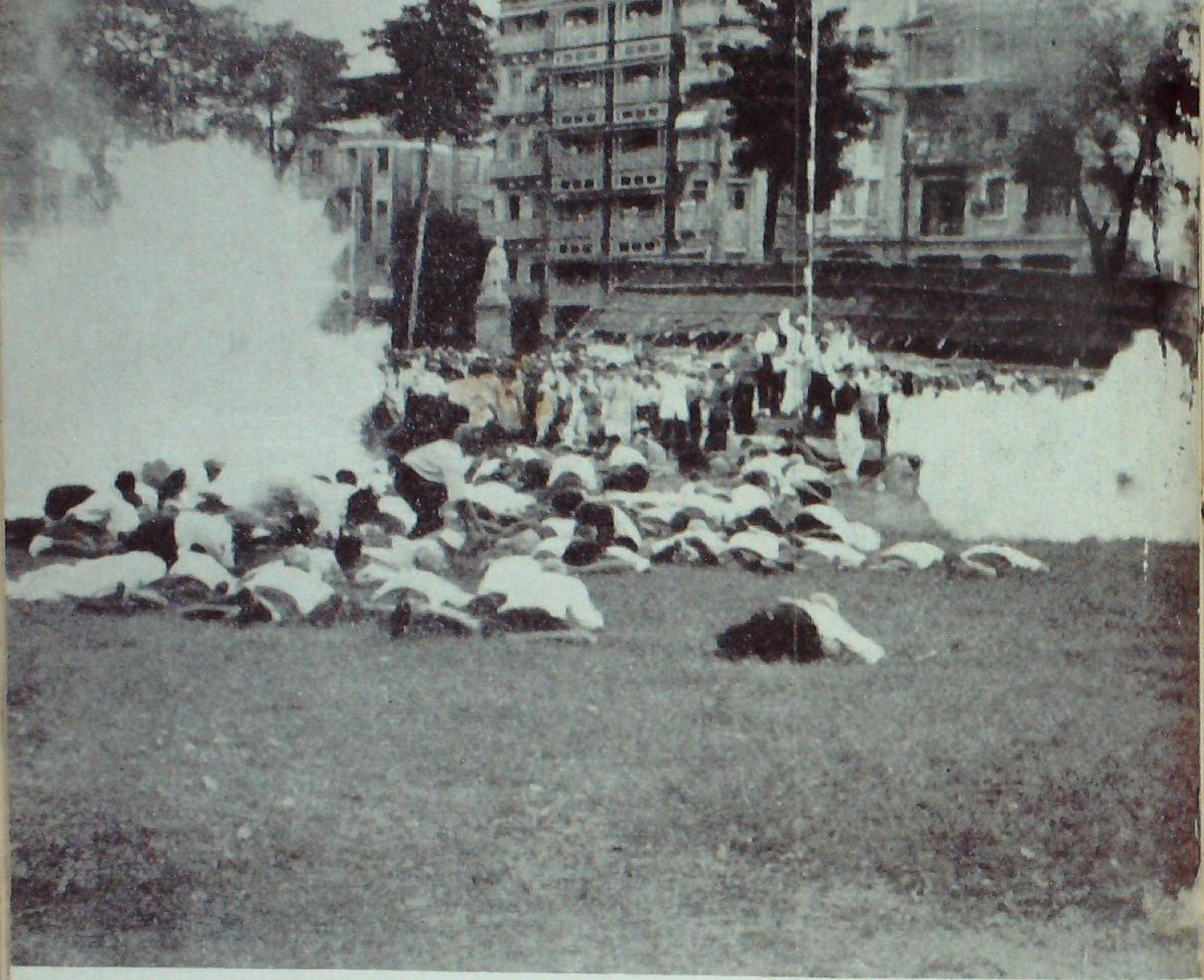




Selling salt during the Salt Satyagraha: Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Dost Mohammed Janmohammed, Avantikabai Gokhale and Sumatiben Morarji with political workers at a public meeting in Bombay



Sarojini Naidu with Mahatma Gandhi and some other delegates to the First Round Table Conference in London, 1930



Police tear-gassing a crowd of peaceful demonstrators during the Quit India Movement in 1942 at Bombay

but had to shoulder all problems relating to women. The organization grew by leaps and bounds, and the fast-awakening women trooped into it like young recruits into a camp. In the meantime, political events were on the march. The Montagu Reform of 1919 had not satisfied political India. There were great uprisings. Jallianwala Bagh came, and the non-cooperation movement. Women felt particularly thwarted, for the Conservative British Parliament refused to give the franchise to Indian women. How could they, when they were not prepared to give it to their own women ? But in India there was force behind this demand from men and women alike.

Sarojini Naidu and her male colleagues spoke with one voice before the Parliamentary Committee on Reforms in London. Finally a compromise was arrived at, and Parliament agreed to leave this issue to be decided by the new Indian legislatures which were to be set up under the constitutional reforms.

One of the earliest acts of the various provincial legislatures was to grant franchise rights to women, followed by permission to enter the legislatures as members. In the elections in 1926, women participated. When the legislatures opened in 1927 after the general elections only a few women could come in as members as the franchise was restricted, being limited only to tax-payers. As such it covered only a small number of people and an even smaller percentage of women.

In the social field, women felt keenly the neglect of education by the Government, and the indifference to social legislation, often vigorously opposed by the Government on grounds of neutrality. From no point of view is foreign rule acceptable. The political issue therefore began to press on every section of the people from all angles, as men and women felt thwarted at every step. More and more, the emphasis began to shift to politics and the issue of freedom.

It was daily growing on the people that independence was the pivotal point, the fundamental necessity. Before it everything else paled into insignificance. Without it there

could be no progress for the country, hence little hope for women to achieve anything in a big way.

Swiftly the tide set its course towards politics, especially when the magnetic Mahatma Gandhi took the helm. The political leaders by now had become convinced that the road to Indian independence did not lie through negotiation and discussion and the tortuous path of niggardly reforms, but through direct nation-wide action. Thus, when the Salt Tax was singled out for breaking, it was as a symbol of the exploitation of the masses and it had a very wide appeal.

Never perhaps since Buddha preached his message has any single individual swayed and transformed the destinies of so many millions as did Gandhiji. Were it not for his leadership, with its wide vision and practical sense, women in India would have had to plod the slow way to the heights they have now been able to attain. He not only respected women, but also valued them. He regarded them as genuine colleagues and comrades. He had a place and a mission for each one. In his social concept there were no superiors or inferiors. Thus, when he planned his non-violent battle for Indian independence, it became an open invitation to women, for this technique was eminently suited to them. He said there was no need for a special appeal to women. He expressed his complete faith in their recognizing and accepting their larger duties towards the country.

OPPORTUNITY FOR LEADERSHIP

One of the characteristics of the technique of satyagraha* is that the leader has literally to lead the campaign and be in the forefront of the fight. In fact, he is the first person to advance, unlike in military warfare, where sometimes the higher the rank of the commander the further away he is from the scene. This technique naturally enabled women to assume leadership.

*Often translated as passive resistance or non-cooperation, but literally meaning insistence on truth—a far more dynamic concept.

Gandhiji's first instinct was to reserve women for some special work and not allow them to participate in the general struggle. But the movement proved too big for that. Even though only a few women were chosen officially to take part in the salt satyagraha with which the Indian revolution opened on the morning of April 6, 1930, by sunset of that first day it had turned into a mass movement and swept the country.

On that memorable day thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper; and, instead of uniforms, the simple cotton *saris* of village India. One watched them fascinated and awe-struck. How had they broken their age-old shell of social seclusion and burst into this fierce light of open warfare ? What had stirred their ancient quietude and turned them into militant rebels ? Undoubtedly the women turned this struggle into a beautiful epic. As Mahatma Gandhi said : "The part the women of India played will be written in letters of gold."

Unlettered, untrained, unprepared, they assumed new duties with unexpected courage. It was the women who made law-breaking universal. Following the violation of the Salt Act came effective attacks on the Forest Laws and other obnoxious taxes and regulations.

Women turned every home into sanctuary for the law-breaker. They lent sanctity to the act by their purity of spirit. Even the mightiest military power cannot cope with a struggle that has its being in the sacred precincts of the home. It begins to realize that here is something that has come to stay. Few of these women had previously thought consciously of their country and its subjection. Most of them were born under the grim shadow of a hard struggle for existence in poor village homes.

There were others, however, who had been sheltered in gilded cages, whose world had never extended beyond their living rooms. But the old magic spell had suddenly been broken. The veil of centuries was torn asunder. Women young and old, rich and poor came tumbling out in their hundreds

and thousands, shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them so long.

Valiantly they went forward without a trace of fear or embarrassment. They stood at street corners with little packages of salt, crying out: "We have broken the Salt Law and we are free. Who will buy the salt of freedom ? Don't you want the salt of freedom?" Their cries never went unheeded. Every passerby stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinck of salt. Thus one more law-breaker was added to the list.

FABULOUS PACKAGE

They appealed to the rich, too. They went into the cotton market, the grain market, the cloth market, the gold bullion market and auctioned salt for fabulous sums. Once a tiny package fetched as much as Rs. 10,000, and each man, as he rolled out the notes with the careless ease of the wealthy, smiled to himself, for he knew that around the corner waited the law. Thus were rich and poor drawn into this mighty struggle until the prisons of India overflowed. Once women even attacked the High Court of Justice in Bomay city and sold salt to the lawyers. They almost persuaded the judges to become implicated by buying illegal salt.

Mahatma Gandhi's successor, who led the salt raid into the fields of Dharasana, was a woman. As she marched at the head of her band of volunteers, she was stopped on the edge of the field by the police, who severely beat the volunteers. So after a few vain attempts they sat down quietly on that sandy path. It was a hot summer's day and the sun shone fiercely on them. They were completely surrounded by the police and cut off from the mainland. The entire salt field had been fenced by barbed wire, so they were trapped, for they could neither move out into the fields nor could the people from the mainland reach them with help and food. Some of the volunteers were very young and were soon consumed with intolerable thirst. With almost diabolical glee, the police

drove water carts through this thirsty crowd, aggravating the savage thirst which was consuming them but never offering even a sip.

But they were brave. They watched their leader sitting with an unfailing smile on her lips, occasionally breaking into rippling humour, giving an encouraging glance here and a sweet look there. They watched her with amazement as she cheered and heartened them. She had dwelt in heavily shaded rooms which the tiniest glare dared not violate, her feet had trod soft carpets. She was a delicate poetess who had spent her days rhyming tender verse. Yet here Sarojini Naidu sat, at perfect ease, as much a queen of this burning sandy world as she had been of her luxurious mansion.

A very thin veil divides the two chambers of the human heart, the one in which lies wrath and the other where dwells spiritual strength rising out of conscious adherence to a great principle. At moments destiny seems to weigh them almost evenly, as she did with this youthful band, but the spirit triumphed ultimately. It was the police who had to give in rather than be forced to keep an all-night vigil.

The volunteers and their leader were arrested. But dawn found a fresh group taking their place. Dharasana had become a sacred battle-ground and for many weeks the battle raged.

A similar raid was planned on the salt fields in the precincts of Bombay city. It fell to me to plan it, but unlike Dharasana, where only a small group was entrusted with the task of the raid, here I visualized a mass raid embracing a large part of the city's 2 million population. I was sure that no force, not even machine-guns, could stop this raid. On the eve of the raid I was arrested, but my parting message to my colleagues and the vast populace was to execute this plan. I was represented by my little son of seven, who proudly carried the banner and engaged in the drama of his first battle.

"MONKEY ARMY"

In Madras, Rukmini Lakshmipati, leader of the Salt Satyagraha in the South, was the second woman to be arrested.

Women played a prominent part in organizing youngsters into the "Vanar Sena" or monkey army, as it was called in memory of the monkeys in Hindu mythology who banded together to assist Rama. The dynamic energy of these youngsters was thus diverted into systematic and disciplined activity instead of running riot. Many were the youthful pranks which the "monkey" army played in the freedom fight*.

Women were to be found in almost every field of activity. They set out at dawn even before the sun was up, walking through the streets unfurling their banners, luring out the slackers and with their ringing songs calling them to battle. The cowards quailed before these gallant women. They enthused the weak and strengthened the waverers. They held mammoth demonstrations in defiance of prohibitory orders. They led processions, and when obstructed squatted on the roadside with cool composure.

The police made every attempt to disperse them, but in vain. They charged with batons, they brought mounted cavalry to trample on them, they even opened fire. On one occasion the processionists sat on, a vast concourse of 30,000, all day and through the night. Filled with despair, the police sat down on the opposite side, keeping a weary vigil as the heavy night dragged on. As the east wrinkled with the first streaks of light, the police abandoned their watch and marched off, leaving the triumphant processionists to move on. And so it was every time. It was never the women who yielded, it was the police who had to give in.

Women became dictators of the war councils set up to direct the day-to-day activities. Outstanding among them were Avantikabai Gokhale, Smt. Kamdar, Shantabai Vengsakar, Smt. Durgabai, Smt. Vedantam, Kamalamma Satyavati and Krishnabai Panjikar. They held responsible executive offices and did a hundred other jobs. Young girls of 10 and 12

*The Vanar Sena was originally started in Bombay by Shri Johri from among Bombay Youth League leaders, and was later taken up by the All-India Youth League over the whole country. Active women participants were Kisan Dhumatkar in Bombay, Rameswaramma in Madras, Vidya Killewalla and I in Bombay, while at the tender age of 12 Indira Gandhi organized 6,000 children in Allahabad.

helped to sell proscribed literature. The people were now printing and distributing their own news sheets which, being illegal, had to be secretly printed or duplicated. Women proved useful collaborators in such a task. For a woman often would have the duplicator in her kitchen or her barn, where the vigilant eye of the police could not easily find it. Sometimes when that failed, the street walls and even the pavements served as boards on which the news of the day was transcribed, to the perpetual amazement of foreign visitors, who were struck by the resourcefulness of women who had so long been described to them as primitive and helpless.

When the Indian National Congress was declared illegal and no communications through the normal channels could be maintained, women came forward to act as messengers and proved even more nimble and cautious than men, attracting less attention. These verbal messengers made national gatherings and demonstrations possible, and enabled the Indian National Congress to carry on its country-wide activities with almost unbelievable continuity.

The breaking of the Forest Laws was another item. In the days when each village was autonomous, the forests on the outskirts of the village were owned by the village community and were its responsibility. The villagers had the right to gather dry twigs to be used as fuel. When the British took over, the forests became reserves and the people were deprived of their natural rights which they had enjoyed for centuries. This campaign took the form of people marching to the forest with a small axe or even a knife and picking up twigs and wood, for these acts constituted an offence. Men and women thronged the jungles even as they had the sea-side, and there followed more beatings, more arrests, more harassment.

CLOTH BOYCOTT

Perhaps the most vital item, not so dramatic as the salt or forest campaigns, in the civil disobedience programme was the boycott of foreign cloth, effected through systematic work

both of a negative and positive character. While the spinning wheel was placed before the country and the nation set itself the task of plying it, side by side vigorous picketing of foreign cloth was launched. The rehabilitation of the textile industry was like the gushing of a spring hitherto gone dry.

Women such as Jaishri Raiji, Hansa Mehta, Perin Captain, Joshiben Captain, Lilavati Munshi, Maniben and the Dave and Mahtre sisters marched to the dealers in foreign cloth with their persuasive air. They asked them to abandon this trade, which was impoverishing the country. "If you give up this sinful trade our industry can be revived again", they pleaded. "The homes will hum with the song of the spinning wheel and the drone of the loom. Mothers will have milk once again to feed their babies and a ready meal for the weary men when they come home at nights. How many today lay their bodies down at night racked by the pangs of hunger !"

But some of the businessmen, hardened by harsh competition, shrugged their shoulders at these "busy-bodies", as they called the women. "You had better get about your own work, cook your bread and rock your babies. What do you know of business and trade ? Do you want us to put up our shutters and go bankrupt? Will not our families starve"? they asked.

The women smiled and gently murmured: "We dont want anyone to starve, and no one need starve in this fruitful country of ours if only we are masters of our own land. But we are slaves. Every yard of foreign cloth you bring into this country only tightens the noose around our necks. Discard foreign cloth and fill these shelves with Indian material."

But the more the women pleaded, the more irritated the shopkeepers became. "Has it come to this that we are going to be dictated to by a handful of sentimental women who ought to know better than to meddle in affairs they know nothing about"? they asked. But the women were not daunted.

Quietly they posted themselves at the shop entrances, persuading customers as they entered, with joined palms as Indians always do in greeting or pleading, not to buy foreign cloth. Though they looked very meek and mild, they proved

very formidable, even more so than their militant window-crashing sisters of the West. Foreign cloth began to be hit, thanks to these women picketers.

The then Government of India, which considered itself the custodian of Lancashire and Manchester interests, was certainly not going to look on complacently at these feminine antics. Picketing was declared illegal and picketers began to be arrested, but the more the arrests the larger became the number of picketers. In fact the ban only added fire to the campaign.

Women came in their tens, in their hundreds and in their thousands. In the first ten months of the 1930 campaign there were 17,000 convictions of women alone. Then the prisoners began to be let off without convictions because the problem of housing them became an impossible one.

The police hit on various devices to terrorize women. In some places, particularly the larger cities, they bundled them into police vans and drove them out into jungles and released them when the night came on, hoping they would be too frightened to drift back into the campaign again. But it did not work.

In other places the police turned water hoses on the women, hoping to cause discomfiture and embarrassment. They also tried to throw mustard and pepper powder at them, and even beat them.

Shopkeepers now found themselves faced with an ugly situation. It was bad enough to have endless groups of women arrested in front of their shops, but when it came to the spectacle of women being assaulted, they felt their stomachs turn. One morning a city awoke to find the foreign cloth market closed. The sun rose high, but the shutters remained down. Sale of foreign cloth came automatically to an abrupt end. The Government was maddened by this prospect. Was the mighty regime going to be thwarted by a few thousand women, and Indian women at that ? The closing of shops was declared an offence, and the resisting shopkeepers were now arrested along with picketers. Long the battle raged, picketing went

on spreading from city to city and the foreign cloth market was gradually paralyzed.

Liquor shops soon became scenes of a similar drama. Drink has always been regarded with censure in India by Hindus and Muslims alike. Drinking is regarded as a vice and has no traditional social associations. The auctions of liquor licences were also picketed by women. Those who came to bid were gently but firmly prevailed upon not to deal in this poisonous stuff. "Don't be a traitor to your conscience and your people and become accused as a destroyer of homes", they were told. The words fell on fruitful soil. The Government revenue derived from liquor sales dwindled. At village festivals, where there was unrestricted sale of liquor, women prevailed upon public organizations and charities to supply free milk and fruit drinks to the merry-makers.

TREE-CUTTING CRUSADE

Nor did they stop at picketing liquor sales. They displayed even more initiative. They started to cut down the sweet date-palm trees from which the liquor known as 'toddy' is tapped. The cutting down of these trees became almost a crusade. Thousands were destroyed by women.

The movement reached its climax in the villages. It was here that the majesty and grandeur of the people's strength was shown at its best, just as the police repression showed itself at its worst. For one thing, the villagers were mostly illiterate, not conversant with law and procedures and could be bullied and terrorized without fear of intelligent challenge. Also, India's villages were so scattered and communications were so poor that what happened in them escaped the eyes and ears of the world. Foreign visitors and correspondents rarely strayed into villages, so that what was done in them could be pretty well concealed. But it was here, in these remote regions, that the men and women of India showed their real genius and strength.

The authorities from the very first regarded women as intruders and resented their presence in the movement. Women undoubtedly added moral weight to the cause and at the same time threw into greater relief police atrocities. At first there were only rumblings and cursings below the breath on the part of the authorities, but later they became more vociferous. It is infinitely easier for sensitive women to bear physical torture than insults. And many and varied were the insults inflicted on them. When fields were confiscated on refusal to pay taxes to the Government, the peasants were driven away under the lash, their ploughs snatched and their cattle taken away.

The police next entered the houses, picked up what they could, the few copper vessels, the more precious pickles and preserves, smashed the earthen pots that had so long cooked the family meals and, finally, after turning out the inmates, locked and sealed the houses. It mattered little whether there was a new-born babe or an old woman on her death-bed; they were thrown out without concern. The defaulters were put under arrest and taken on the long march to the nearest lock-up under the blazing sun. The women were made to trudge as the police marched beside them hurling abuses or ugly jokes to humiliate them. If the women showed resentment they were instantly reminded of the power of authority by the very vigilant baton.

Prisons in India are by no means modern dwelling-places, but the village ones are the worst. Women were flung into these dark dingy holes with their damp air, musty smell and bats hanging from the ceiling. There they crouched through the weary nights, for no light was permitted inside. The police often beguiled their dull watch by poking fun or jeering at the women. There were no human conveniences provided in these cells and every morning, noon and evening the women were taken out, always accompanied by male guards so that their sense of modesty felt outraged.

REPRESSIVE ORDERS

Only children of three and under were permitted to remain with their mothers in prison. In the no-tax campaign areas

whole families were convicted and children above the prescribed age of three were often left on the streets. Those who offered asylum to them were prosecuted on grounds of aiding and abetting illegal activities. In fact, as the movement progressed even an ordinary humanitarian act became an offence under one or other of the numerous ordinances in operation. Anyone who sheltered, fed or even offered a drink of milk to a political worker became a suspect in police eyes. But so pronounced was the spirit of defiance that few ever attempted to hide or deny their identity or acts, and many were the professional people who willingly sacrified their jobs or businesses, courting prison rather than turn traitor to their country.

Certain new rules to govern politicals in prison had been introduced just before the start of the 1930 movement as the result of the death of a political prisoner, Jatin Das. Despairing of vain protests and representations to secure a different status for political prisoners to that of ordinary criminals, he finally resorted to a hunger-strike and offered his life on the altar of prison reform. The news shook the country and forced the Government to introduce changes. Prisoners were classified as A, B, and C. The A Class was a privileged class, and the prisoner was allowed to supplement the prison diet at his or her expense. Next came Class B, which restricted the prisoner to prison clothes and diet. The C Class was the lowest grade. The clothing was very thick and needlessly heavy. The food consisted of coarse bread made of the cheapest cereal, served with lentils in the morning and some cheap greens in the afternoon.

The public never at any time appreciated these classifications, for it was both unnatural and ugly for workers who fought in the same battle to be thus graded and divided according to some unreal social scale. As the tempo of the movement rose, however, the Government began to put practically everybody into Class C, with only a handful in B and hardly any in A. This was partly for the sake of economy, partly to make prison life as much a deterrent as possible.

But men and women marched in cheerfully. In these gloomy cells, little babes first saw the light of day. Women

fell back on their ancient native wits to meet these delicate situations, their eyes often twinkling at the humour of the situation and their laughter allaying pain and sorrow. Newcomers caught and responded to this irrespressible spirit of cheerfulness. Mothers were proud of these "war babies" and commemorated the event by giving them appropriate names: "Princes of the Prison", "Lord of the Struggle" and "Victory" were some of the names. The babies belonged to the entire community and were mothered by all.

A woman who had lost her baby in prison took to nursing a newcomer, whose mother was ill with typhoid, and before long she adopted this new child. Such adoptions were by no means isolated cases or confined to babies. Even older girls, if they happened to be orphans found new parents. Prison life in its weird way had a humanizing influence, breaking down old walls of caste or religious prejudices. Few factors contributed so effectively to social merging as the sharing of this intimate life together, first on the battle-field, then in confinement. The Brahman forgot to maintain her high class exclusiveness or seclusion. There were no untouchables or outcastes in this community. Everyone was a member of one big family.

NEW CHAPTER

With the very first phase of the political movement, a new chapter had opened in the history of Indian women. There is no doubt that theirs was a key role. It can be confidently said that without their help the movement could never have been a success.

Seva Dal camps for women were opened all over the country to train them for political work. Early in 1931, at the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress, a resolution was adopted promising the people of India the fundamental rights now embodied in our Constitution. In it was incorporated the significant clause: "there shall be no discrimination on the ground of sex". This marks the birth of a new era for women. By the close of the freedom struggle women had become very

definite entities in the political world, for all classes of women had by now entered the movement and made their mark.

There was a short interlude of fresh political reforms in 1935, when the Provinces were conceded a larger measure of responsibility. The franchise was expanded. It included one curious feature: whilst voting rights were extended to literate people besides tax-payers, in the case of women the wives of voters were also granted the franchise, and seats were reserved for women in the State legislatures. Both these innovations were strongly opposed by women on the ground that they wanted equality with men and not special concessions. The protests, however, went unheeded.

In the 1936 elections, a large number of women came into the legislatures and took up responsible offices as Ministers, Deputy Speakers, etc. Women were already playing an active part in municipalities and local boards.

In 1942, when World War II came to Indian soil, Gandhiji realized that the crisis should be highlighted by a showdown. He declared that India had no quarrel with Japan and that the Japanese raids and invasion plans were directed against the British masters of India and not the Indian people. If the British were to leave India, the Japanese would not want to conquer this country. India, like all colonial countries, was merely a pawn in this imperialist game. Gandhiji therefore called upon Britain to quit India. The Congress passed a resolution to this effect on August 8, 1942, and it became known as the "Quit India" Resolution. This was the signal for a reign of terror in the country. Thousands of Indians, men and women, including all the important political leaders, were arrested overnight. Gandhiji's message to the country was "Do or Die". In his opinion, this was the final stage of India's struggle for freedom.

UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

Practically every section of the people plunged into the struggle. As all the known political workers had been rounded up at the very start, entirely new people, with no political

bias or affiliation, entered the field. The character of the struggle also changed. It was no more confined to open *satyagraha*. Side by side was a well-organized underground movement. Many women distinguished themselves in various roles. Among them were Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kripalani, both of whom carried on as underground leaders, and Usha Mehta of Bombay who ran an underground radio.

When the transfer of power to Indian hands began in 1946 and the first Interim Government was set up at the Centre, it naturally included a woman. Several women were also included in the Constituent Assembly and made significant contributions to its deliberations. In 1947, when India finally became free, women began to come into their own. The major political parties encouraged them and tried to secure representation for them in the Central and State legislatures.

Today large numbers of women hold important posts in the home as well as the foreign services. Their rise to responsibility and positions of importance has been remarkable. Education is still rather slow in proportion to the demand, for the new State has yet to make adequate provision. The number of women in public life must, therefore, be small compared with the population. But it is encouraging as compared with the number of educated women. What has also been remarkable is the very natural manner in which women have been able to find their place. This has not been marred by ugly and unseemly fights and struggles, violence and hate. Indeed, this smooth evolution has been in keeping with India's tradition and genius. But we should not overlook the fact that the man who more than anybody else made it possible was Gandhiji, with his non-violent fight for independence.

OUR OWN TIMES

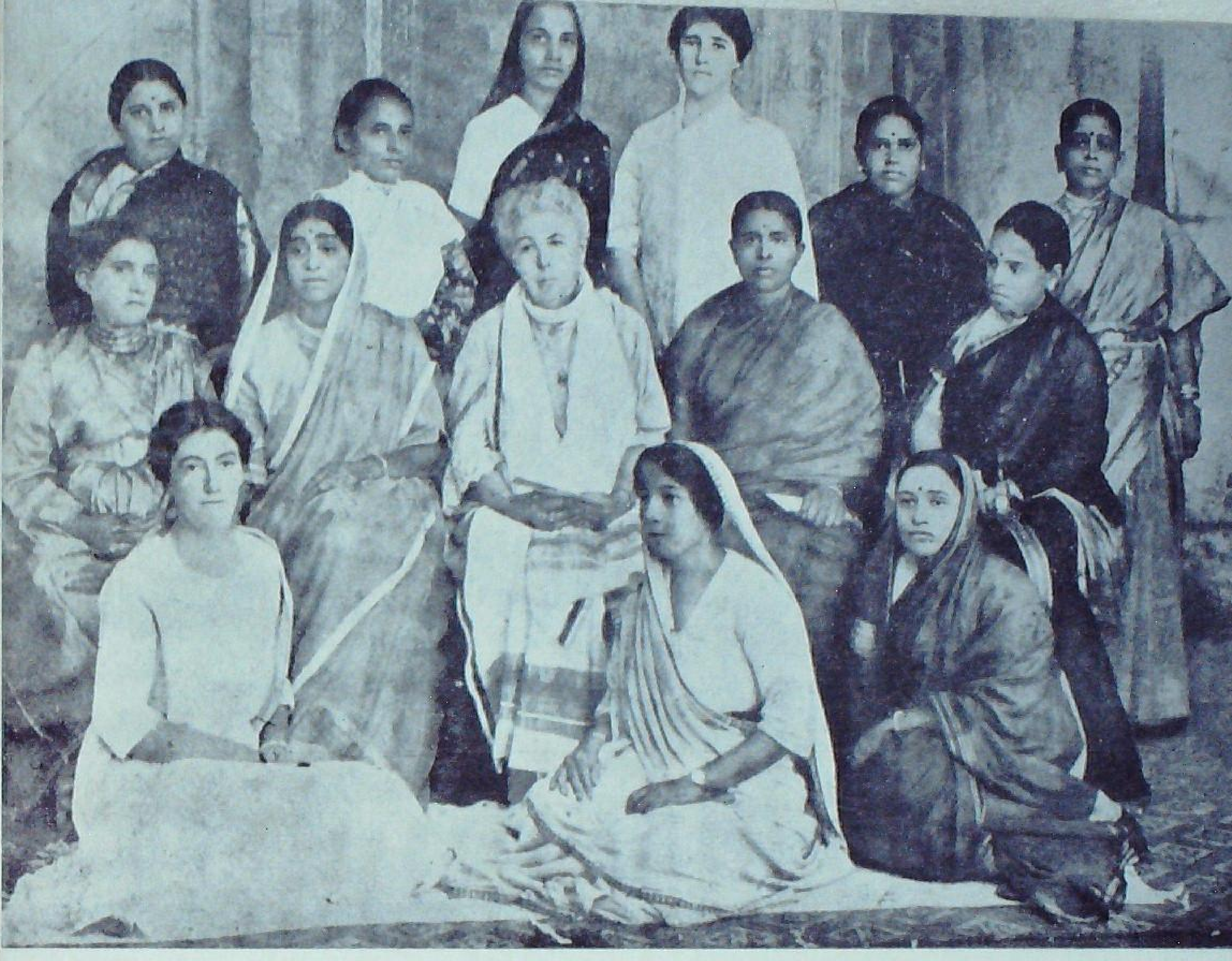
Hannah Sen

The position that Indian women occupy today is very largely the result of a little more than a century of earnest endeavour on the part of social reformers, educationists and political leaders; for it was the 20th century that really ushered in an era of dynamic change and new concepts which fundamentally affected the status of women, giving to it a fresh dignity and importance. In India, because of her political subjection at the time, progressive movements had a political tinge and were the reflection of a people's determination to throw off all shackles of bondage. The women's movement was no exception to the rule. Therefore, it was only when India gained her political freedom and emerged as an Independent Sovereign Republic that women truly came into their own as equal partners with men. This principle of equality was incorporated in the Objectives Resolution of Free India in 1947 and was later elaborated in the Constitution of the Indian Republic.

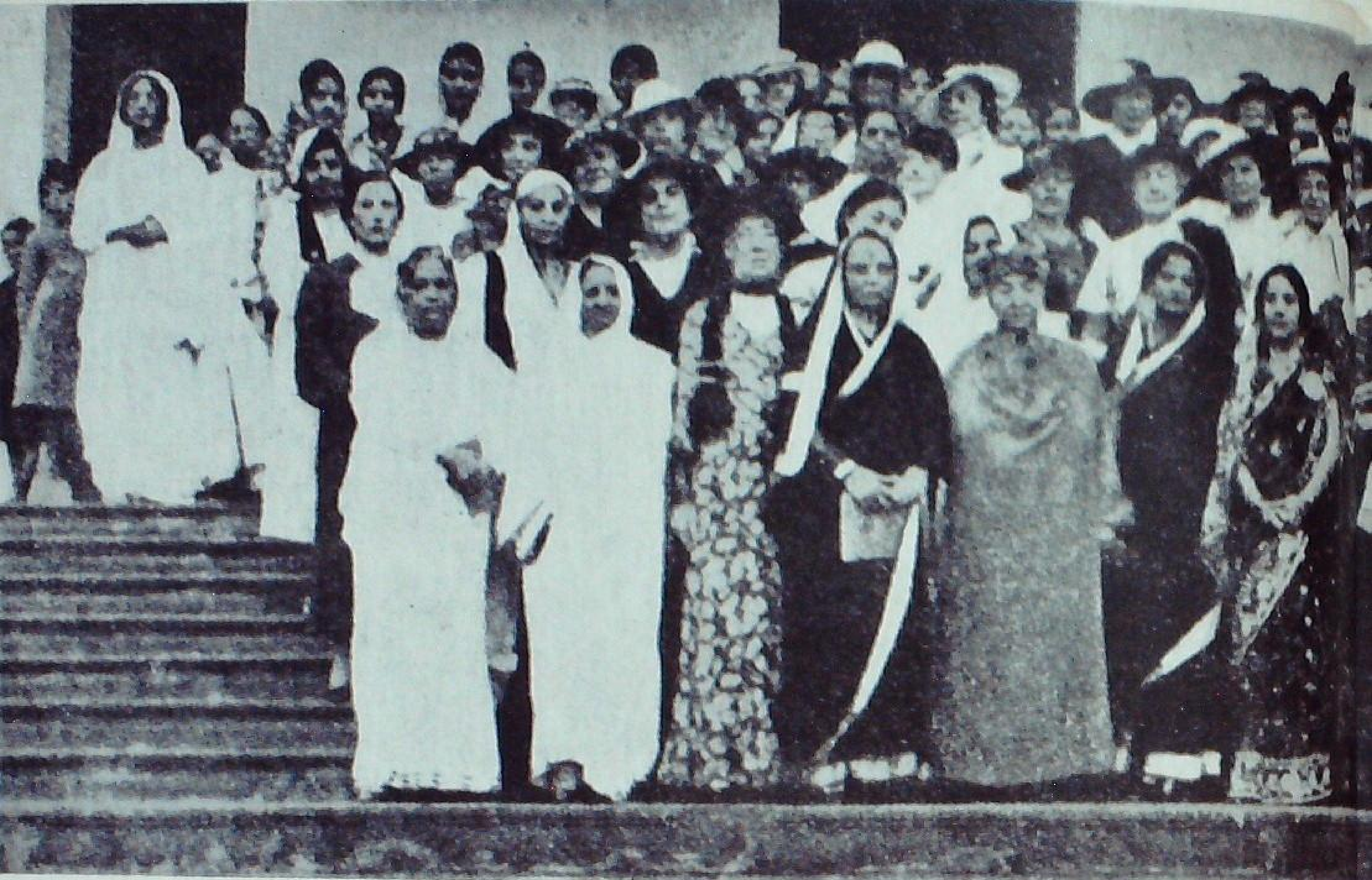
The recognition of the right of women to complete equality opened up new pathways of service and encouraged women to play an increasingly effective role in public affairs. Those who have watched India's social and political trends in the decades prior to her independence regard the rapid advance of women and their easy adaptation to new ways of life as a staggering achievement. Much of the credit for this is due to the liberal attitude adopted towards women by the social and political thinkers of the day. They, one and all, believed that India's progress was closely linked with women's advancement; and that if India wished to recapture her past greatness, she should permit her women to share, and share fully, in the glorious task.

NINETEENTH CENTURY BACKGROUND

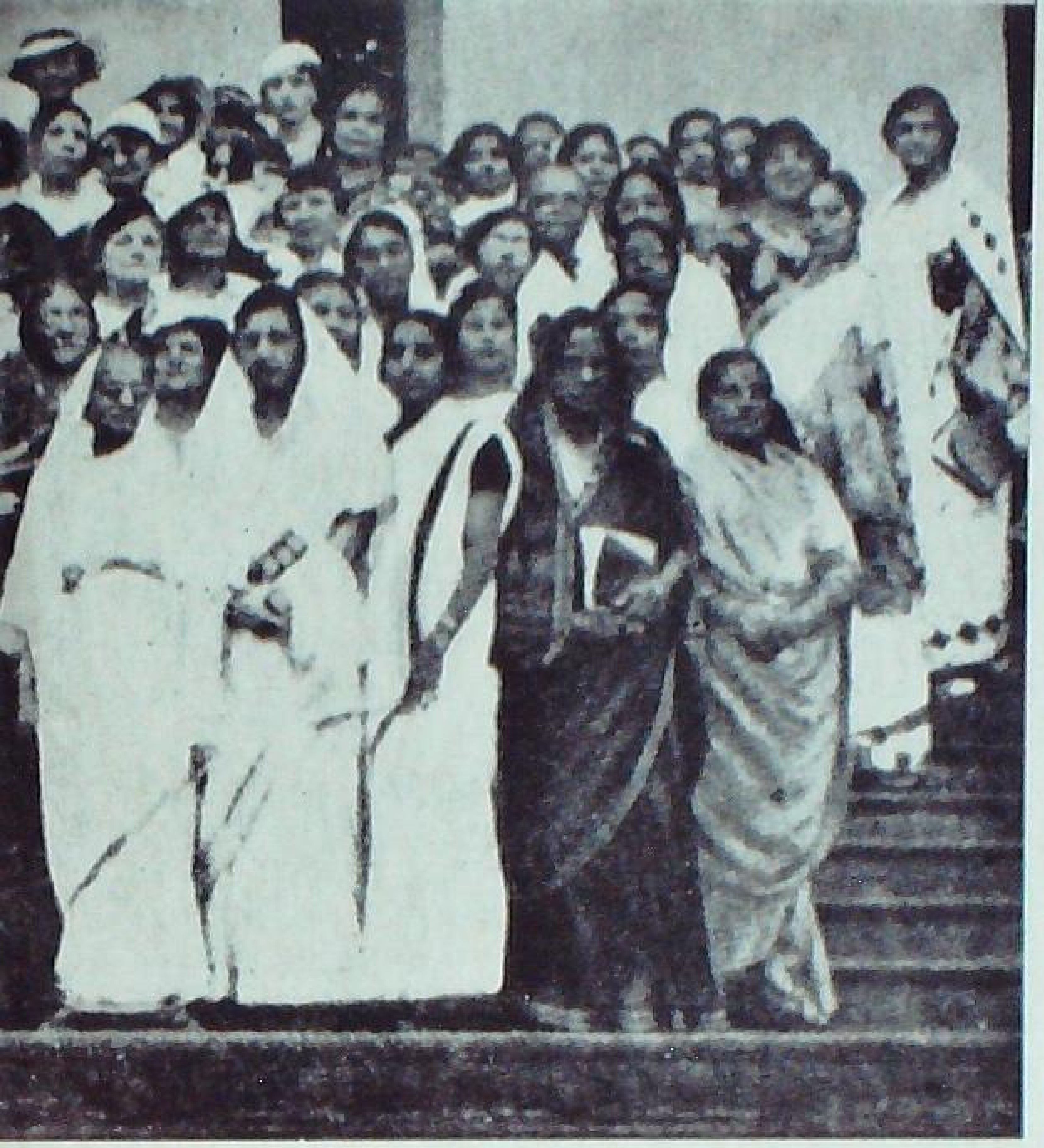
A review of India's recent social history points to many outstanding events as significant landmarks in the awakening



The Indian Women's Deputation to Montagu and Chelmsford, 1917, demanding the vote for women: Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Smt. Jinarajadasa, Margaret Cousins, Begum Hazrat Mohani, Hirabai Tata, Dr. Joshi and others

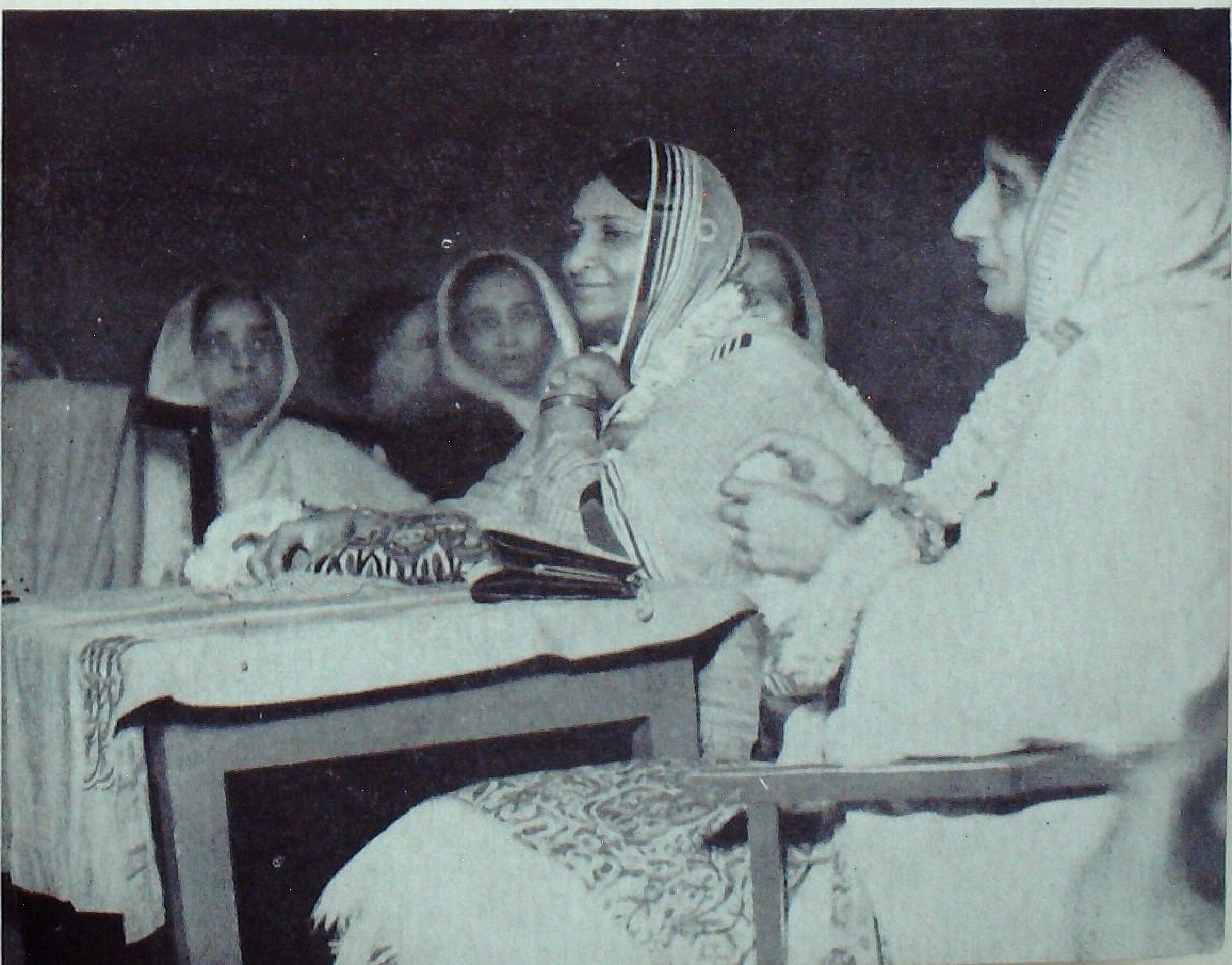


(Below) Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba with Gurudev Tagore at Santiniketan



Delegates to the joint conference of the International Council of Women and the National Council of Women in India held at Calcutta during January 1936. In the photograph are Miss Van Veen, Executive Secretary of the I.C.W.; Princess Cantacuzene, Vice-President of the I.C.W.; Lady Pentland; Chimnabai; Maharani of Baroda; the Maharani of Mayur Bhunj; Lady Ezra; Lady Shafi; Lady Mitter; Mrs. P. K. Ray; Dr. Miss Jhirad and others.

(Below) An early session of the All India Women's Conference in 1938 : Begam Hamid Ali and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur



and emancipation of her women. It will be remembered that, as an outcome of internal wars and the misinterpretation of customs and religious sanctions, the condition of women in India was at its lowest ebb during the greater part of the 19th century. It is an admitted fact that in upheavals brought about by political forces and foreign domination women usually suffer the most. Fortunately, during this period of women's greatest degradation, there were deep stirrings of conscience among the intelligentsia of the country.

The tide of degeneracy began to turn with the powerful reformist movements of the mid-19th century, led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Justice Ranade in Bombay, and Swami Dayananda Sarasvati in the Punjab. To them the British occupation of India was not entirely an unmixed evil. These Indian stalwarts, who contributed so substantially to the shaping of India's destiny, were profoundly influenced and motivated by British rationalism, liberalism and democracy. In the background also were the activities of foreign missionaries, which, though laudable in parts, often caused some misgiving. These missionaries were among the first to carry on a strenuous campaign against the social disabilities then prevalent. Polygamy, child marriage, enforced widowhood and *sati*—all affecting women—received the full force of their impact. Believing that a close relationship existed between the social practices and the religious faith of the people, the missionaries directed their fiercest attacks against religious as well as social institutions. Evangelical work formed an essential part of their programme, leading to large-scale conversions from Hinduism. This naturally provoked a reaction among Hindus. Measures were devised to counteract the inroads of foreign missionaries. Hindu religious and social reformers sprang into leadership to take the initiative in such matters. The most notable among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who lived a life of dedicated service and with whose name is intimately associated the establishment if the Brahmo Samaj (a reformed sect of Hinduism), the founding of educational institutions and, above all, the abolition of *sati*. To him, distinctions of caste and sex were false and irrational.

He stood four square for those changes which underline the principles of social justice.

Other reformers followed and the setting up of schools for girls and freeing of women from the trammels of outworn customs became the order of the day. In other parts of the country, too, similar movements grew in momentum. In Western India, the Prathana Samaj and, in Northern India, the Arya Samaj, both counterparts of the Brahmo Samaj, brought about a revolution of old concepts in an atmosphere of religious questioning and a broadened outlook. The age of social and religious reform dawned.

The entry about this time of such religious savants as Swami Vivekananda, Annie Besant and Sister Nivedita into the struggle for social and educational advancement further forged the links between religious and social observances. Indeed, throughout the 19th century and even later, religious inspiration activated the most progessive thought and action. With Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the foundation of the Servants of India Society in 1905, there was some shift in emphasis. Gokhale and his colleagues paved the way for a more intellectual and factual approach to the solution of social and other problems. The tradition set by them to a great extent fixed the pattern of social work and stressed the value of specific and scientific training.

SPEARHEAD OF ATTACK

With the turn of the century, new ideas began to sweep across the country, and it was then that women's organizations and a strong women's movement took shape. Women entered public life and themselves became, through their organizations, the spearhead of attack against irrational orthodoxy, injustice and discrimination. Working in collaboration with Indian women, and often guiding and inspiring them, were British women of outstanding stature who came equipped with the experience and practical wisdom of the West. Among those who left a lasting impress of their personality were Margaret

Noble—later to be known as Sister Nivedita—Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins. All of them, Irish in origin, suffragette in sympathy and former participants in the Irish Home Rule agitation, were drawn to India by her spiritual and cultural heritage. They came to learn but they remained to serve. By their contribution towards educational expansion and political freedom, and by their championship of the cause of the downtrodden and the underprivileged they won a lasting place in the hearts of the Indian people.

Many were the momentous events that punctuated this period of India's history. In 1914, Annie Besant entered Indian politics and delivered her famous address "Wake up India". In 1917, she was elected the first woman President of the Indian National Congress and, in the same year, with the help of Margaret Cousins founded the Indian Women's Associations in Madras, which became a model for women's institutions elsewhere. Enthusiasm for political freedom gained in intensity, and with it came the realization that freedom for women was an integral part of freedom for the nation. It was in 1917 that the question of women's franchise was also mooted. A deputation of women, with Sarojini Naidu as spokesman, presented a Memorandum to Mr. E. S. Montagu, then British Secretary of State for India, demanding votes for women as well as increased educational and health facilities. They stood firmly and unequivocally for the open door of election. This incident marked a distinct phase in the story of India's emergent womanhood. Public meetings and local conferences were held and, two years later, another deputation of women waited on the Parliamentary Committee on the Government of India Bill. It was decided that votes for women, being a domestic subject, should be left to the Indian legislatures to decide. Women encountered very little opposition in these legislatures and, by 1929, they were enfranchised on the same terms as men, thereby becoming a very vital unit in national life.

Another factor of deep concern to women at the time was the advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene. As a man of vision and an uncompromising fighter, he was India's

most effective exponent of national and individual freedom. Both in his person and in his teachings Gandhiji embodied a synthetic approach to the problems of the people. He was not merely a politician but also a constructive worker, social reformer, friend of the poor and well-wisher of women. Under his direction, the Indian National Congress, established many years earlier, became a live instrument of progress. His loyal attachment to truth and non-violence had a wide appeal; and when he placed before the country his ideals of *swadeshi*, non-cooperation and civil disobedience, the people were profoundly stirred and magnificently responsive. Women accepted his leadership as eagerly as did men. National consciousness was roused as never before and the people were made aware of their duties no less than of their rights.

Once women had decided to throw themselves whole-heartedly into the fight for political independence, their success in other fields was assured. In 1928, another woman—this time an Indian, Sarojini Naidu—was chosen President of the Indian National Congress. Women further consolidated their gains in 1930 when three of them—Sarojini Naidu, Jehanara Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbaroyan—were invited to take part in the discussions of the Round Table Conference convened in London to examine India's political needs and aspirations. Yet another sign of women's growing prestige was to be seen in the legislatures of the country. By 1940, there were as many as 80 women legislators, placing India third among the nations of the world in this respect. Adult franchise and complete political equality came with the independence of India and the adoption of the new Constitution in 1950. The chapter on Fundamental Rights—Articles 14 and 15—guaranteed to all citizens, irrespective of sex, "equality before the law", "equal protection of the law" and "equality of opportunity in matters of public employment". Thenceforward women enjoyed the same right as men to vote and to contest elections, to seek and to hold public office and to exercise all public functions.

With the growth of political power came added responsibilities. To women, it became an inescapable duty to cross

the circumscribed frontiers of their homes and extend their services to a larger world. This explains the presence today of large numbers of women in the administrative departments of the Government; in the various services, professions and vocations; in all grades of legislatures, and in the Central and State Cabinets. When the first general elections were held in 1952, masses of women took advantage of their new status and exercised their vote with discretion and enthusiasm, fully justifying their country's faith. Their position in public affairs has been well stabilized and no prejudice is likely to stand in the way of further advancement.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

Side by side with these political changes, a multiplicity of women's organizations was formed to meet the new challenges and to furnish the necessary services. In the early years, many associations—the first being the Arya Mahila Samaj founded by Pandita Ramabai Ranade in Poona—had as their main objective the removal of women's social disabilities. When the role of education as a great liberating force came to be recognized, educational programmes were included in their activities. *Seva Sadans* and Widows' Homes were established both to give shelter to the ill-treated and the helpless and to arrange for such general education and vocational training as would facilitate their re-absorption into the community.

With the spread of education, more and more women left their homes in order to dedicate themselves to the service of their people. Women's organizations increased in number and variety, each performing its own allotted task. At the present day, a few thousand of them exist, spreading the message of hope and courage throughout the length and breadth of the country. Some of them have developed multipurpose programmes which touch life at many points—social, educational, cultural, economic and political. With their widening range of activities, these organizations offer a splendid chance of leadership to women. They consider it their prerogative

to discuss and to contribute to all matters of national interest. Their journals, the *Stri Dharma* of the Women's Indian Association, the *Roshni* of the All-India Women's Conference and the *Bulletin* of the National Council of Women, reinforce the extensive propaganda directed by them towards the cause they cherish.

A few organizations of all-India status have reached an eminence that has brought them international recognition and repute. The best known are the National Council of Women, the All-India Women's Conference, the Young Women's Christian Association and the Federation of University Women. They were formed 30 to 35 years ago and have already covered the country with a network of active branches. All of them have international affiliations. The National Council of Women was affiliated to the International Council in 1925 and the All-India Women's Conference enjoys direct consultative status with the United Nations.

The aims and objectives of the N.C.W.I. and the A.I.W.C. are somewhat similar. It was through their joint efforts that the women's movement developed and women's rights and grievances became the focal point of public concern. In most matters affecting women, these two associations have usually been consulted. The Y.W.C.A. in India, in keeping with similar organizations in other countries, has concentrated its resources chiefly on building hostels and commercial schools for working women. The Federation of University Women amongst its other duties watches over and supports women's academic and professional claims.

An organization of more recent growth and of equal worth, the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, was founded in 1944 as a symbol of nation's homage to a great woman. Its special contribution, unique in some ways, has been its almost exclusive devotion to the well-being of women and children residing in the rural areas. Through its training programmes and its band of selfless workers, it has sent out several thousands of *gram sevikas* and other welfare personnel for service among village women.

For the expansion of the women's movement and the development and success of women's organizations, notable contributions have been made by several hundreds of women of merit and ability who are still active in the field of work. Their names cannot be recorded here for they are too many. To mention some would be to make invidious distinctions. They deserve a whole book to themselves if adequate tribute is to be paid to their splendid services to their country and their people. Their personal sacrifices, the untold indignities they endured during the freedom struggle, their patience and their faith will continue to guide and inspire younger women for generations to come.

In assessing the value of the work done by women and women's organizations, the role played by men and men's organizations cannot be overlooked. In India, these two streams of workers have criss-crossed each other's paths in a spirit of mutual understanding and friendly co-operation. Women have not had to labour alone and unassisted. The struggle was between liberalism and conservatism rather than between men and women. Women's improved status, even in the economic and political spheres, where there was some degree of conflict and rivalry, was the outcome of the active partnership of free-thinking men and women.

It would be pertinent to refer, in this part of the narrative, to the valuable services rendered in the cause of women's welfare by other agencies which have a mixed membership. Women have functioned as successfully through them as through their own exclusive organizations. The Bharat Scouts and Guides have made guiding, with all its benefits, a regular feature of school life and the Bharat Sevak Samaj, with its extensive and varied projects, is fast developing into a welfare organization of great promise. The schemes formulated by the Red Cross Soceity have helped considerably in the promotion of health services; and the activities of professional and political bodies, each with its own specific aims, present a variegated pattern of highly creditable and useful work. Against a background such as this, the rapid rise of women and their easy march towards emancipation became inevitable.

SOCIAL AND LEGAL CHANGES

The social, no less than the political, evolution of the 19th century had its repercussions in many directions, with far-reaching effects. The old attitude towards women, as individuals and members of the community, was drastically revised. It yielded to a more rational appraisal of their rightful place in the family and in society. The double standard of morality, which demanded perfect chastity and fidelity from women alone, was questioned; and the conventions of *sati* and enforced widowhood ceased to be popular. Doubts were expressed as to whether they were religious injunctions. The consensus of opinion was definitely in favour of change. With the adoption of the Prevention of Sati Act in 1829, the way to the removal of social anachronisms, which had caused so much distress to Hindu women, was laid open, and the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 was its natural corollary. It legalized the marriage of widows and declared the issue of such marriages legitimate.

It was a strange irony that the very measures which had been designed in the past to protect women and to safeguard them from exploitation led to practices that defeated their purpose. It is well known that the rigours of *sati* and the ill-treatment of widows often drove women to prostitution or to seek refuge in the precincts of temples, where they became victims of their own ignorance. The Widow Remarriage Act came none too soon, nor the homes and training centres that were set up by social welfare agencies to ameliorate their condition and to offer them new opportunities for economic independence. Growing educational facilities brought fresh hopes, and the social stigma attached to widows steadily began to disappear.

The reformers next turned their attention to the evils of polygamy and early marriage, both of which had greatly handicapped women's social advancement. In regard to early marriage, though consummation very seldom, if at all, took place before the onset of puberty, there was always the danger of early widowhood. Child widows were, in those by-gone

days, not an infrequent phenomenon and an outmoded social code condemned them to a life of unrelieved chastity. This was the *raison d'etre* for the agitation, so vigorously led by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, that marriage should take place at a more mature age. In some of the States—Baroda, Indore and Mysore—then administered by enlightened Indian rulers, social legislation in this respect made its first beginnings; but it was not till 1924 that the matter was taken up for serious consideration by the Central Legislature of the country. After prolonged debate, the Bill in question was referred to an Age of Consent Committee, and in 1929 the Child Marriage Restraint Act was put into force. By its provisions, the age of consent within marriage was fixed at 18 for boys and 14 for girls, and outside marriage at 15 for girls. Amendments to this Act finally raised the age of marriage for girls to 15 and the age of consent outside marriage to 18. Statistics and sample surveys conducted by social scientists show, however, that the large majority of marriages in India—more than 77 per cent—now take place after girls have reached the age of 17 years.

BAN ON POLYGAMY

Polygamy, like *purdah*, is rapidly becoming an institution of the past. In a country where there have been for many decades several million fewer women than men, polygamy could never have been practised on a massive scale. Nevertheless, in the context of the changing social structure and the growing emancipation of women, it could not very well have been tolerated, even in a small way. Since 1955, polygamy has been completely outlawed by legislation among all sections of the people, except the Muslims who continue to be governed by their personal and religious laws. It was felt that the enforcement of the will of the majority on a minority community would not be an act of wisdom. In justification of this stand, the Law Minister of the Government of India pertinently remarked: "In the sphere of legislation, as in other spheres, true reformation is a process of evolution rather than

revolution. . . . Priorities are important and have to be observed . . . . For an ultimate assimilation of the whole community we must begin with the larger section of the community, which can appropriately be assimilated by a uniform piece of legislation."

Purdah, which kept women, particularly Muslim women, secluded and segregated, has given way in the face of enlightened propaganda. Whilst it may be true that *purdah* promoted modesty and the qualities of gentle retirement, so highly prized in women in former days, its deleterious effects on health and the restraint it placed on the free movement and interests of women keep it out of tune with the requirements of modern life. Happily, everywhere and in all communities, Muslim and non-Muslim, women have gained in poise and courage and are firmly breaking away from the restrictions of an outmoded imposition.

The story of women's social emancipation would be incomplete without some reference to the part played by the Indian National Social Conference in the late 19th century. Those were the days when even leading politicians were as deeply involved with social problems as with political rights. The Indian National Congress, whose main preoccupation was politics, nonetheless saw the dependence of political gains on social progress. By mutual arrangement, the meetings of both the Conference and the Congress were held in the same *pandal* in immediate succession to each other. This was a clear admission of their affinity of interests and it enhanced the prestige of both organizations. There was a tremendous upsurge of feeling and social reform became a subject of universal concern.

Some years afterwards, under the fiery onslaught of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, this partnership was unfortunately broken and the Indian National Congress maintained a policy of aloofness. With the parting of the ways, Gokhale and other workers of prominence arose and, in an attempt to retain a balance in national objectives, identified themselves unreservedly with the social reform movement. To some extent, but in a new form, the old relationship between the Indian

National Congress and social changes was restored when Mahatma Gandhi assumed political leadership and forcefully directed the attention of his colleagues to the latent potentialities of women and to the compelling urgency for social reform and constructive work.

Though the last chapters in the social evolution of women have yet to be written, the recent adoption by the Central Parliament of the main sections of the Hindu Code Bill was an immense step forward and brought some very welcome and vital changes in the status of women. Till then, women's progress in respect of social legislation had somewhat lagged. Their legal rights of inheritance, marriage and guardianship remained vexed problems for many years. Local and piecemeal efforts were initiated from time to time to remove their more distressing grievances. But the absence of uniformity and universality in these laws made them ineffectual, as miscreants often escaped to States where the laws were not operative. Opinion in favour of a unified civil code gradually gained ground and led to the framing of the Hindu Code Bill, which covered such subjects as marriage and divorce, succession and also guardianship and adoption. The main purpose of the Bill was to equate the differences then existing between men and women among Hindus. Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and Parsis were not affected, as their laws concerning women were more liberal.

HINDU CODE LEGISLATION

The first instalment of the Hindu Code Bill, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, enforced monogamy, outlawed polygamy and conferred equal rights of divorce on both men and women. The passage of the second instalment, the Hindu Succession Act, was not as smooth. It dealt with the most complicated branch of Hindu law. Yet, several far-reaching amendments were accepted which fundamentally affected women's rights of inheritance. Among women's gains under this Act, the most consequential was the extension of their "limited estate"

to one of absolute control over their property, no matter how acquired. Hitherto, except in regard to *stridhana*—property acquired through gift—women had no rights of disposal. The second important change recognized the right of the daughter and her children to succeed equally with the son and his children to all the property of either parent.

The other main clauses of the Act sometimes favoured women and sometimes men. The mother was placed in a higher line of succession than the father and the right of residence in the family dwelling house was accorded to the unmarried, deserted, separated or widowed daughter. These privileges were conceded to women as, because of past neglect and discrimination, they were likely to be in a state of economic dependence for some years to come. But they were more than counterbalanced by the retention of the principle of survivorship in the *Mitakshara* system, which tipped the balance in favour of sons. The women of India are fully conscious of this and other defects in the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, and they will not rest till all legislation, which conflicts with the principle of equality, is repealed or modified.

The third and last sections of the Hindu Code Bill, on adoption and guardianship, have also passed into law in the form of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956 and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956. The clauses, in their attempt to safeguard adequately the mother's right to be the natural guardian of her children and to have a say in the adoption of a child, represent a significant departure from old attitudes and practices, which is certainly very satisfying to women. Legal recognition has been given also to the right of either parent, under certain circumstances, to adopt a son or a daughter. For those very important and vital changes that have found their way into the old and somewhat rigid system of Hindu laws, India and her women are deeply indebted to two great lawyers for their valuable and indefatigable services in the cause of social reform—Sri Benegal Narsing Rau, the main architect of the new legislation, and

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who helped, as Law Minister, to pilot the bills in the earlier and more difficult years.

Another problem rather disturbing to women is that of prostitution, an evil common to most countries. It has recently come to the forefront of social planning. The Association of Moral and Social Hygiene in India, assisted by allied organizations, has been in the vanguard of the agitation for the proper control of prostitution in all its forms. They have pressed for suitable revision of existing laws; for the introduction of sex education in schools and colleges; for the registration, licensing and inspection of homes for women and children; and for the appointment of a strong vigilance police force. Their labours, spread over a period of several decades, have begun to bear fruit.

When the Central Social Welfare Board appointed a committee of women in 1955 to enquire into the causes and conditions of prostitution and to submit their recommendations, public attention was vividly drawn to the dangers of this social vice and the inadequacy of present laws. Comprehensive legislation was framed and its passage through Parliament was watched with the deepest concern. The presence in Parliament of women members and their earnest anxiety to promote such legislation augurs well for the future. The eradication of most social ills and the removal of social handicaps are now in sight.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

As has been indicated already, the changes in the life and position of women were greatly accelerated by the spread of modern education. The first phase of this system of education in India can be traced to the early 19th century, when the East India Company became the paramount power. At that time a fairly extensive system of Arabic and Sanskrit schools existed, which regarded knowledge primarily as a means to spiritual growth. When, under Macaulay, English

was introduced as the court language and became the medium of instruction in high schools, the indigenous schools fell into disfavour. They were unable to adjust themselves to the new needs of a changing society; and the novel experiment of teaching people through a foreign language took precedence. With the good came the bad, and many were the unhappy results: the development of vernacular literature was retarded, a cleavage was created between the intelligentsia and the rest of the people and the aim of learning, from being spiritual and religious, with its emphasis on the formation of character, became increasingly utilitarian. When the new type of education came into vogue, planned to supply the personnel required for running a bureaucratic regime, it was regarded as unsuitable for women. A distaste for it developed and women soon lapsed into a state of illiteracy.

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, an early pioneer and a noted educationist, foresaw the interdependence of social progress and educational advancement. He devoted many years to the furtherance of women's education. By 1847, with the founding of the first women's college—Bethune College—in Calcutta, resistance to modern education was broken; and by 1885, primary and secondary education of the new pattern was generally accepted as desirable for girls. In the beginning progress was slow, and it was only in 1882 that an Indian University sent out its first women graduates. The situation since then has greatly altered.

An analysis of the statistics of the last few decades show a steep gradient in the number and diversity of educational institutions for women and of the students who make use of them. In 1954-55, for which figures are available, women students in schools of all grades were well over 8 1/4 million; in universities and institutes of higher learning, 83,000; and in technical, vocational and special schools nearly 200,000. These figures relate only to Government and Government aided institutions and do not include unrecognized private schools and colleges, where an appreciable number of women and girls receive education.

The educational survey of 1954-55 struck another cheerful note. The old disparity in the numbers of educated men and educated women, so disquieting 30 years before, was being gradually but surely reduced. A comparison of the statistics of that year with those of the previous year revealed that, taking into account all categories of teaching institutions, female students increased by nearly 10% in one year and male students by only just above 5%. But with the ratio of literate men to literate women standing roughly at 5 to 1, a big gap still remains and it will take years of careful planning to bridge it completely.

The urgency and value of women's education has been well recognized. There is no legal bar any more to women seeking any form of education. All universities have been thrown open to them, and the Constitution of India has conferred on them equal right of access to all educational opportunities. For some years now, women have travelled freely along the broad highway of education. For their own special aptitudes and interests, they have been provided with special institutions attached to most of the universities of the country, such as the Lady Irwin and other colleges of home science, the Lady Hardinge Medical College, the College of Nursing at the Centre and several schools for the training of health visitors. There is also an exclusive women's university, with its headquarters at Bombay, catering to women's specific requirements. Home science studies, once woefully neglected, now form an important adjunct of all educational curricula. In consequence of these added facilities, it is expected that women's education will receive a fresh impetus and that women will make more effective use of the educational institutions and programmes at present available. It is expected also that in the planned drive against illiteracy now engaging the attention of the educational authorities, and in the organized spread of social education among the adult population, women will benefit equally with men. The recent deliberations of officially appointed commissions, representing all levels of education, their reports and their recommendations are significant pointers to the changes that

lie ahead and the attempts that are to be made to remove the defects of the old system and to bring it more in conformity with the genius and needs of the people. The peculiar interests of women and of other distinctive sections of the community have received particular emphasis.

WIDER HORIZON

The impact of education on the economic status of women has been as strong as its impact on other aspect of women's development. Women's economic horizon, once limited to household chores or labour on the farm, has expanded considerably. As each new need arose, a new service was released. Women's first response was to the call for teachers. More than a hundred years ago they took to this profession, and today they constitute 21 per cent of the million teachers in the country. With the establishment of hospitals and health centres, women have qualified as doctors, nurses, health visitors and midwives; and when law colleges, agricultural, engineering and other professional institutes opened their doors to them, they invaded their precincts also. There is scarcely any avenue of employment which women have not entered.

By its precise statement that no citizen shall, on ground of sex, be ineligible for any employment or office under the state, the Constitution has greatly enhanced women's economic status. In fulfilment of this obligation, the Government of India decided to throw open all its services—educational, foreign, political, administrative, medical, etc.—to women, on the same terms as men. It is not surprising, therefore, that women are to be seen increasingly in all types of services, professions and vocations. Their record of work and their ability have raised them to positions of high distinction as Cabinet Ministers, Governors of States and even as ambassadors.

In the lower grades of occupation women are equally protected against exploitation. The Government of India has accepted the convention of "equal value", adopted by the International Labour Organization a few years ago. The

Central Pay Commission used this principle as the basis of its recommendations and, by making it a directive principle of state policy, the Constitution further accentuated its importance. But even before that, in 1948, the Minimum Wages Act, while providing for the fixing of minimum wages for certain scheduled jobs, did not permit the fixation of different rates for men and women workers.

It would seem thus that the road to economic independence has become broad, clear and safe. Yet unemployment, particularly among the lower income groups, is said to be on the upgrade; and women's reluctance to seek pursuits outside their homes, though very much weakened in recent years, still stands in the way of their total economic emancipation. The University Education Commission, in its Report of 1952, tried to put women's domestic preoccupations in their right perspective. While agreeing that "the greatest profession of women is, and will continue to be, that of the home-maker", the Report urged "yet her world should not be limited to that relationship". Much thought has been devoted to this problem and to the formulation of schemes that would effect a harmonious adjustment between women's economic interests within and outside their homes.

The Planning Commission, the Industries Departments of the Central and State Governments as well as private agencies like the Indian Co-operative Union have unanimously supported the view that cottage as well as small-scale industries which allow some of the processes to be done in the home would specially appeal to women. Plans towards this end have been evolved and are in different stages of execution. Often, as an integral part of the training centres, there are sheltered workshops where the sale of the finished articles are the responsibility of the sponsoring authority.

A new venture in this field has been the Family Welfare Service, inaugurated about two years ago by the Central Ministry of Commerce and Industry in conjunction with the Central Social Welfare Board. It serves the two-fold purpose of providing employment to women as well as certain welfare services, such as medical aid, family counselling and child care.

To each factory established under its aegis is attached a committee of women who, in an honorary capacity, act as a liaison between the workers and the Government. This service has already grown into a popular movement, with bright promise for the future. To women economically hard-pressed it holds out hope of relief.

There are also other schemes under the direction and control of Ministries of the Government which substantially contribute to the economic welfare of women. The most extensive and varied fall within the orbit of the newly appointed Ministry of Community Development. Vast projects have been put into operation throughout the countryside on a scale and magnitude never seen before. They are designed to mobilize all the resources of the village community and to effect an all-round development of the life of the people. These village projects have become an essential feature of India's programme of revolutionary and dynamic change. Under their impetus a new pattern of village life is being born, in every part of which women will be required to play a vital role. As village level workers, teachers, craft instructors, doctors, midwives, nurses or *dais* a host of women will receive employment and will carry the message of better living to the remotest corners of the country. The community development programme has been planned to reach every village, bringing about sweeping developments and the promise of mass employment.

HEALTH SERVICES

An encouraging feature of the community projects is their emphasis on health services. That health measures are indispensable to all integrated programmes of community welfare has been fully recognized. Efforts to improve health have been greatly intensified since India gained her freedom. Within the limits of available funds, health services have figured prominently in all schemes of planned development. The absence of adequate facilities in the past resulted in widespread epidemics and in heavy maternal and infant mortality.

The position has to some extent been corrected, but a great deal remains to be done. The Government of India is aware of this and is in the process of carrying out a nation-wide programme for the establishment of a network of health centres.

International aid and the co-operation offered by W.H.O. and U.N.I.C.E.F. in some of the health projects of the country are helping appreciably to speed up expansion and to raise the standard of medical education and care. In the rural areas, they supplement the work of the community projects and the mobile health vans maintained by Government departments and voluntary welfare organizations. It is confidently expected that 1961—the final year of the Second Plan period—will witness the full coverage of the half a million villages of India.

In respect of women's health, there is also growing understanding of the necessity for family planning. Much publicity has been given to the injurious effects of uncontrolled spacing of children on the health of the mother and on the vitality of the community. The early pioneers in this field were voluntary agencies or interested individuals. When the problem began to be viewed from the economic angle, stress was laid on the advisability of stabilizing the population at a level consistent with the requirements of the national economy, and measures for family limitation and control became part of Government policy. The vast amount of propaganda broadcast by the Family Planning Association of India has not been in vain. Though the rate of population increase in India, approximately $1\frac{1}{4}\%$ per annum, is lower than that of the U.S.A, the United Kingdom and other advanced countries, it has been generally held that it must be greatly lowered as there is danger of the growth of the population outstripping the rate of economic and social progress.

During the First Five Year Plan period, the Central Ministry of Health received an allotment of Rs. 65 lakhs for the purpose of conducting research, carrying out field experiments on different methods and assisting in the extension of the relevant services. A further step was taken in 1956, soon after the commencement of the Second Five Year Plan, when

a high-powered Board on Family Planning, consisting of officials and non-officials, men and women, was set up by the Government of India under the chairmanship of the Health Minister. At its first meeting, the Board made some far-reaching recommendations which are likely to be adopted by the Government of India and are calculated to stimulate, vitalize and add to the existing services. Among the recommendations, the most significant are the assurance of financial assistance to non-governmental organizations; the provision of publicity vans, equipped with audio-visual aids, to be used by the propaganda teams; and the appointment of additional women doctors in selected primary health units to implement family planning programmes. During the last few years, people's minds have been steadily conditioned to accept the benefits of family planning. Health clinics are well patronized, and their advice and guidance readily sought.

Among other measures for the medical care of women are the Maternity Benefits Acts, which are applicable to women and, in conformity with similar Acts in other countries, provide care and protection to expectant mothers.

In all these schemes of medical welfare, it is evident that women doctors have a distinctive and definite place. The Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital for Women in New Delhi is an expression of this faith. It was founded some decades ago and has rendered valuable service to the community by adding to the number of women doctors graduating each year from other institutions of medical learning. Plans are afoot to expand this college as well as other teaching units and to open up new opportunities to women for medical practice and careers.

From the foregoing paragraphs, it will be seen that in the promotion of welfare schemes and in the formulation of welfare legislation progressive women have played as noteworthy a role as the Government.

PUBLIC CO-OPERATION

The Planning Commission, in its reports relating to the Five Year Plans, has pointedly drawn attention to the

inadequacy of Government resources and the continued importance of public assistance. The pace of the implementation of the programmes depended, it said, on the extent of the co-operation received from the people. It was vital that at every stage voluntary workers should assume joint responsibility with the Government. This principle it applied very forcibly to planning for social welfare, a subject that lies very close to the hearts of women. In consequence of this, many new agencies were set up at governmental level for organizing public co-operation on a national scale. In most of them, women have a major share in the responsibilities and are making significant contributions to national welfare.

These agencies have opened up new and broadened avenues for public service. Through some of to them, the Central Social Welfare Board for example, women are attempting to bring about a co-ordinated and balanced development of welfare programmes for both the urban and rural areas. To prepare an exhaustive list of such organizations would not be practicable; but a few may be mentioned by way of illustration—the Nursing Council of India; the All-India Handloom Board; the All-India Handicrafts Board; the Sangeet Natak Akadami and the Women's Savings Campaign. Their very names signify their purpose and show how varied are women's new interests.

On the international plane also there is evidence of the growing stature of women and the high place accorded to them in public affairs. In all official delegations to important international conferences, to the meetings of the United Nations, its Commissions and its Specialized Agencies, women invariably find places. Indeed, modern women have gone far beyond the problems relating to their personal rights. Having secured political emancipation, social equality, economic independence and opportunities for educational advancement, they are turning their attention to other problems which are equally momentous. These problems include the health of the people; the care and protection of the backward and indigent; the eradication of social vice; the upgrading of the under-privileged; the preservation of India's cultural

heritage; the execution of the Five Year Plans and, above all, security and justice for all mankind. Women are bending their energies towards that end. They are in the vanguard of progress as effective partners in all schemes of national planning. Yet they cherish those moral and social qualities that distinguished them in the pages of history. With their feet firmly planted on their own native soil, and with pride in the noble aspects of their heritage, they are adjusting themselves, with notable success, to the pressures and demands of modern living.

WOMEN IN INDIA AND ABROAD

Lakshmi Menon

The last hundred years may rightly be called 'the age of woman's awakening' in this world. Although in history we read of the independence of women in certain communities in ages past, such independence was more true of the primitive communities or of communities which had been left out of the main stream of European civilization. For even in unassailable strongholds of democracy like Athens, women were merely possessions and obtained education under great difficulties. If Plato wrote that "as far as the state is concerned there is no difference between the natures of men and women" it was because of the unequal laws and customs then prevailing in Greece. His plea that woman ought to be admitted to all the duties and rights of man and his warning regarding the loss to the state as a result of their restricted sphere of activity still remain unheard. We of course quote Plato, Mill and a dozen others in support of our plea for equality, but alas, human society has to march a long way before this dream of philosophers and this ideal of equality and freedom can be realized fully in actual life.

The most remarkable thing about the story of woman's progress towards freedom and equality is the strange uniformity of its pattern. Whether in Africa, America, Asia or Europe, the prejudices that hamper the path of progress, the obstacles that woman has to encounter and surmount seem almost identical. It is this which makes the struggle not a national one but a human one, thus lending kinship to our ideals, methods and achievements.

The peculiar disability attached to woman all over the world is based on religion. Woman's basic disability originates in religion. Woman is temptress and is warned against in almost all religions of the world. Political disability is also biologically defined and becomes the basis for economic and

social disabilities. That is why even in the most expansive moments of the French Revolution the revolutionaries thought fit to reject the Declaration of the Rights of Woman. The popular slogans "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" applied only to man, because the religious prejudice against woman triumphed even when reason was presumed to have replaced religion. This happened not only in France but in other countries also. In the United States the question of franchise for women was considered at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and was referred to the individual colonies. Jefferson stood for the exclusion of women from political activity in a democracy. The object of such exclusion was to prevent "depravation of morals and ambiguity of issues" which would result if women were to mingle with men in public meetings!

These prejudices persisted even after the advancement of women in the fields of education and industry. Although progressive literature, like the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and still later in 1869, Mill's *Subjection of Women*, influenced the movement for equality all over Europe and Asia, there were other and more potent factors. These need our attention for a proper evaluation of the problem. Here let me also state that the task for the colonial and backward territories was rendered less painful because of the pioneer efforts of the women of the West. We have shared the harvest garnered by them thus making the story of woman's freedom a part of the history of general human progress.

EQUAL PARTICIPATION

The intimate relation between economic development and woman's emancipation is an important fact which is often ignored. A good deal of the freedom and equality of the sexes we find in primitive communities is due to the fact that, except for a few taboos based on biological factors, there was equal economic participation. There was, generally speaking, no hidebound rule as to the different activities of man and woman. It was noted, for instance, among the Indian communities of

Vijayalakshmi Pandit presiding at the 8th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

The 5th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, at which Hannah Sen was Elected Vice-President

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, President of the International Red Cross, with Red Cross Executives in Australia

Lakshmi Menon (Centre), Deputy Minister of External Affairs, seen with Judge Kenyon and Mrs. Tomlinson at the United Nations when she was elected Chief of the United Nations Section on the Status of Women

America that while in some communities women did jobs which were regarded as properly those of men, in adjoining areas men did jobs which were definitely women's.

It is in feudal societies that we find the sharply defined distinction between man's sphere and woman's sphere. The woman belonging to the property-owning and well-to-do classes, who had the advantage over the landless and poor classes, became a parasitic and protected being who spent all her time acquiring those accomplishments which might make her capable of pleasing her husband. This peculiar trait was not confined to any particular country or area. It was the outcome of certain conditions and was found wherever these existed. The tragedy, however, lay in the fact that it was regarded as the standard of attainment devoutly to be pursued. Even today, while we talk of the independent woman with ecstatic fervour and the hard-working woman is looked down upon as a pitiable wage earner, it is regarded as the standard of achievement for the lucky woman.

Feudal prejudices still persist, although feudalism is outmoded. It is again this distasteful parasitism that has deprived woman of her moral leadership and economic partnership. She has become dependent on man for her livelihood, and this unhappy dependence has made her not only economically dependent but also socially weak and politically powerless. It has also produced customs and taboos which confine her to certain spheres of unskilled activities and unenviable echelons of social services. What is still worse, this has crystallised the concept that man alone can be the head of the family because, irrespective of whether he earns the bread or not, he is considered the breadwinner. Notwithstanding all the revolutionary changes that have taken place in human society, this idea persists like some ineradicable vice.

It is a well known fact that every economic change revolutionizes social ideals. It is the industrial revolution that, by transforming the processes of production, changed the pattern of the economy. It disrupted the agricultural economy, characterized by scattered homesteads, low income groups

and feudal ideas. It brought about a concentration of population in industrial centres and released women into the swelling stream of wage earners. The impact of industrialization had its natural impact on woman. It led the way to her economic independence. It led her to seek increasing opportunities of education and new avenues of employment. The opportunity to work was prized and sought after, and measuring herself with man she found she could hold her own and the struggle for equality followed.

BOUND BY TRADITION

The chief obstacle in the way of woman's equality has been the strongly held belief all over the world that women can be of little service outside the home. This attitude is more marked in backward communities, where women have fewer opporunities of showing their mettle and are bound by feudal traditions and social and religious taboos which keep them away from economic and political participation. Hence it is natural that backward peoples and backward sections of population are more anxious for equality than freedom. The cry for more and more liberty, it is said, is a sign of progress whereas the cry for equality is the inevitable sign of backwardness. Judged by this standard women all over the world may be regarded as the most backward section of the human community.

The women's movement for freedom and equality is just over 100 years old, if we start from the year 1848 when the American pioneer, Susan B. Anthony, unfurled the flag of equality for women. Since then the struggle, with wider objectives, has gone on all over the globe under the inspired leadership of pioneer women and women's organizations. They believe that women have a role to play in patriotic fellowship with their menfolk to build a better world through building a better country. It is impossible to mention their names for their number is legion. Since 1848 the world has witnessed movements for educational opportunities, political

rights and economic equality. The agitation for these goes on and increases as women are awakened and made conscious of their backwardness, and diminishes in the progressive countries where the problems are tackled successfully. It is in this context that we should study the position of women in India.

One of the phenomenal changes that has taken place in recent years in India is in the position of women. Although the change appears revolutionary, if we study the movement carefully we will realize that it has been a slow one and the result of social, religious and economic forces.

In the West, the status of woman was changed by the conditions generated by the industrial revolution, humanitarian movements and the women's movement for equality. In Asia and all other countries industrially not so advanced, the change was brought about by reformers with a strong religious background. The pace of progress was accelerated by political circumstances like liberation movements and the impact of communism—a new ideology which undermined tradition and religious beliefs. In India our reformers began to view the problem as a humanitarian one. Just as the anti-slavery movement helped the women's movement in the United States, here in India the inhuman customs which prevailed in the 19th century demanded a humanitarian movement. Thus our early reformers—Dwarkanath Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy and others—strove to convince their countrymen that *sati* (immolation of widows) was not enjoined by religion and its abolition was an act of humanity. On the same basis, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, another reformer of eminence, enabled the Government to legalize widow remarriage. The tremendous importance of these two reforms at a time when religious sentiments and customs were scrupulously respected by the East India Company has yet to be realized.

UNCHANGED SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Important as these enactments were, Indian society needed a strong public opinion to implement them. For instance,

while the abolition of *sati* was regarded as an act of humanity, those who performed it were held up as model wives and paragons of virtue. In other words, while legislation made progress, social attitudes remained where they were. That is why even today we come across accounts of *sati* in some remote villages and no general protest is heard. The same is more or less true of widow remarriage. The marriage of widows is still an uncommon event in Hindu society and the number of young unmarried widows that we meet every day is proof that it is yet to be accepted by large sections of society. Bad customs die hard.

Social reform should go hand in hand with educational opportunities. At a time when education meant English education, the common argument was: 'what does it profit to have women educated in English schools except perhaps for reasons of matrimony?' It was not realized that the education of girls is as necessary as that of boys. Indian women owe a great deal to the Governments of progressive States like Travancore, Cochin, Mysore and Baroda, to foreign missions, educational acitivities and to indigenous religious foundations like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Deva Samaj, etc., for recognizing the need for encouraging the education of women as part of social reform. One hundred years after the abolition of *sati* we had the Child Marriage Restraint Act and during the last 26 years various other changes in the legal system. Today there is one uniform system of law of marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc., for all citizens of India except Muslims, Christian and Parsis. Since the Constitution in its Directive Principles of State Policy provides for a uniform Civil Code, it is to be expected that this will be done in course of time. The effect of recent legislation has been definitely to eliminate existing inequalities and give equal rights to women.

In India, as in other Asian countries, social conscience needed something more than legislative measures to awaken it. This came in the form of liberation movements in which women participated alongside men in patriotic fellowship.

Participation in freedom movements created a new consciousness in and gave new confidence to women. It also helped change men's attitude towards women's participation in a manner hitherto unexpected.

In India, due to Partition, with its vast upheavals, women were forced out of their sheltered homes by homelessness and economic pressure to rehabilitate themselves. A new force was generated and this, combined with increasing opportunities for education and employment, has pushed women into the ever swelling stream of humanity seeking employment. Today that freedom is an accepted fact and has come to stay. The Constitution, proclaimed in 1950, does not recognize woman as a social inferior as in some other countries but as a citizen of standing having equal rights with other citizens. This equality has to be implemented by expanding opportunities for education and employment and by a radical change in social opinion regarding woman's status in free India.

BORROWED PREJUDICES

In the Orient, whatever the religious background of the people, there is very little feeling against women as such. Not a few of the existing prejudices and disabilities owe their origin to the West. For instance, the concept that woman is of no use outside her home is not easily acceptable to countries which have had women rulers and women warriors. A remarkable woman plays her part. No public positions hindered the work of Sarojini Naidu or Ramabai Ranade. A good cause never failed in India for want of support. While some of our law givers were harsh on women, religions never laid any restriction on those who sought salvation. The names of Avveiyar, the Tamil saint, in the South, and Mirabai in the North are great ones honoured by all. Maharani Lakshmibai of Tranvancore and Ahalyabai Holkar of Indore were noted for their humane and efficient administration.

In the 13th century ruled Sultana Rezia, poetess and states-woman. Other women noted in Indian history are Nur Jehan Begum, Chand Sultana Bibi, Jehanara Begum and Zebunnissa.

Freedom movements in Asia have thrown on the canvas of national service not one but hundreds of women who are making their contribution in an orderly and disciplined manner, and working with patriotic fervour to make freedom real and peace a necessity. The numbers that occupy places of importance may be few, but the fact that they are there is an indication that the door of entry is open wide.

Today Indian women have access to all spheres of administration and public life except in the Armed Forces. We have women as Ministers, Governors and Ambassadors but all too few in the Judiciary. In industry, women still occupy the lower echelons of unskilled or semi-skilled services and this can be remedied only when there are proper arrangements for vocational guidance and diversified courses in the secondary school stage.

One of the misfortunes of our educational system is that higher education is not available easily for those who need it, because it is expensive, especially for our girls. The favoured ones use higher education as an adornment, and those who need it, and whose services would add to the wealth of the country, have little chance of acquiring it. Unless higher education is made free this will not be possible. Hence the traditional system finds favour with the large majority of well-to-do people.

While women have long been regarded as efficient teachers, their opportunities in other fields have been restricted. Their place in the medical profession and university education came long after. The legal profession also did not open its doors easily to women, although there are no restrictions today. The last citadel of reaction in this respect is the diplomatic service. It is in this section that we have the fewest number of women. Yet it is astonishing that even in countries where women are not in the legislatures they find places in the diplomatic service*. From information at our disposal, supplied by various Embassies in New Delhi, it is seen that while there are no women in the legislatures of Ethiopia, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq,

*Appendix

Cambodia and Syria there are women in the diplomatic services. On the other hand, in countries like Japan, Italy, Finland, Poland, Norway, China, etc., where women were found in the legislatures in fairly large numbers, none are found in the diplomatice service. It is worth while investigating the reason for this anomalous position.

From the beginning of women's emancipation the prejudice against the employment of married women created special problems for women in service. However able, a woman became disqualified on marriage. The ban on marriage in service shows, if anything, utter incapacity to understand the natural functions of women and a penchant to exaggerate the natural as an impediment to progress. Now, of course, intelligence has dawned on the Governments of the world and marriage is considered to be a very natural phenomenon, to be treated as such. A few mid-Victorian concepts as to the status of women still linger, and as prejudices they die hard. The attached list in Appendix 'A' gives the available information in tabulated form.

RESTRICTED OPPORTUNITIES

The gains of freedom, although impressive, are far from the real goals to be attained. In countries where women have had decades of freedom and opportunities, their participation is even now very restricted. Take for instance the United States, a most progressive country where women are educated and organized with amazing efficiency and effectiveness. Their number in the diplomatic service is 200. Of these, two are chiefs of mission, but there are only 14 members in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate. This is strange because the League of Women Voters is one of the most powerful women's organizations there doing electioneering work.

Those of us who are distressed to find so few women actively participating in the councils of the world must remember that in Britain the first woman was elected in 1918 from an Irish Constituency, but as a member of the Sinn Fein Party she refused to take her seat. The first woman to become a Cabinet

Minister was Margaret Bondfield in 1929. Howsoever few such women be they will be remembered for their championship of great causes and their zeal for humanitarian service.

The number of women in the legislature of any country is far below the ratio warranted by their numbers, interest in public affairs and social welfare or qualifications. Politics is just not regarded as woman's domain. She can be used as a voter, canvasser and propagandist, but when it comes to sharing power and rights the picture is not so clear. I have heard this complaint not only from political aspirants but also from women holding executive positions in administration. They find the greatest obstacle in achieving anything from men, who find them a nuisance if not potential rivals. This attitude is not limited to one country or one nation. It is universal, and the only way to dissipate it is for women to work hard and in perfect unity. There is no doubt that today women are living in glass houses. Their actions are critically watched and their achievements evaluated by applying higher standards. Hence they have to watch their every step carefully. It is justly said that when a man commits a mistake the individual is blamed; whereas when it is a woman the whole community of women is blamed.

In the elective bodies of India women are represented in the panchayats, local and district boards, municipal councils and corporations, and State and federal legislatures. Wherever they are given opportunities they have acquitted themselves, as women would and should, honourably. The relative ease with which women came to their present position is due to the successful termination of the struggle in progressive countries of the West, where women acquired these opportunities the hard way.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are many international women's organizations which have worked with great idealism and altruism and still work with the same spririt. They include the Women's league for Peace and Freedom, the International Alliance,

the International Federation of University Women, the International Council of Women and the Federation of Business and Professional Women. These work as international pressure groups without any political prejudice, with absolute devotion to the cause of women's freedom and equality, and wih the object of making women's united strength a real force for peace and international understanding. We have organizations in India which are associated with these international bodies, besides national organizations which carry on the work within the country.

It is as a result of the combined efforts of all these organizations that we find in the legislatures and administrative offices all over the world women moving about and working with confidence and a sense of responsibility. Yet this is the achievement of a few decades only. The first women to get the vote were those of New Zealand, in 1893. They were followed by the Australian women in 1902. The Scandinavian countries were next. Finland gave the vote to her women in 1906, Norway in 1913, and Iceland and Denmark in 1915. Swedish women, on the other hand, did not get the vote till 1921, three years after the conlusion of the first World War. Englishwomen got limited franchise in 1917, the year in which the Soviet Union, the Netherlands and the Ukraine gave full franchise to their women. In 1918, the United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland and Luxembourg gave the vote to their women. The establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1918 gave suffrage to German women in 1919. The same year the women of Austria and Czechoslovakia received the vote. The United States of America and Hungary freed their women politically in 1920. In France, the land of new ideas, the Senate repeatedly rejected extension of the franchise to women, although it was favoured by the Chamber of Deputies. A judicial decision declared void the election of candidates in the municipal elections in Paris. French-women had to wait till 1944, almost the end of the second World War, before they got the vote, while Italian women had to wait till 1945 for the privilege.

The first Asian country to give the vote to women was Mongolia, in 1924. She was followed by Ceylon in 1931 and

Thailand in 1932. Among the colonially exploited countries, Indian and Burmese women got the vote in 1935, and those of the Philippines in 1937. The savage struggle for independence waged in Indonesia, prevented her women from getting full political emancipation till 1949, though for leadership at home and abroad they rank very high.

All over the world we find that revolutions, patriotic movements and political cataclysms have been favourable to women. Sometimes we are led to wonder why human society is so thick-headed that it needs revolution and the infinite tragedy accompanying it to realize that social justice cannot be denied long to any group of human beings, much less to women, who have an interest in preserving peace.

To Indian women, however, who did not suffer the bitter struggle of the suffragette movement, the vote as such was never looked upon as a yardstick of progress or emancipation. It was, of course, important in the eyes of the law that Indian-women should get the vote. It enabled both sexes to work in cordial co-operation in the framing of the Constitution in 1950 and in implementing the political and social legislation that has followed since.

During the last 35 to 40 years the process of increasing women's participation in the economic as well as the political life of their countries has been going on steadily. Today, there are perhaps a little over a dozen countries where women do not have the right of franchise. This is to a large extent due to the increasing opportunities now available to women for education and employment. But the pattern of development is not even. The movement for uniformity of standards of development is very much like Sir Galahad's search for the Holy Grail. It is seen approaching and, before we reach it, it disappears.

WIDESPREAD INEQUALITIES

If we look at the world as it is constituted today, we find inequalities of every kind. For instance, there are member countries of the United Nations which do not have a democratic

form of government. There are countries which still accept the segregation of women behind the veil. There are also countries where educational opportunities are denied to women either because of poverty or harmful social customs; and even when all these opportunities are available, political rights are denied. Then there are countries which discriminate against women by differential qualifications or limited franchise. All these things should be a matter of great concern to all of us who think, feel and believe that the freedom and equality of women is a necessary corollary to real freedom. In a healthy society, not only should all activities be integrated but also all sections of society. Since the conduct of public matters is closely related to each individual and family, we should agree with Plato that the absence of women's participation would be a loss to the community. Hence it becomes imperative that these inequalities should be totally eradicated.

International action to raise the status of women began in a small way with the League of Nations. In the 15th Assembly of the League we find a resolution expressing appreciation of the work done by women in support of the League of Nations and noting that women were unanimous in declaring that the equal status of men and women was a prerequisite of the effective collaboration of women in the work of the League, and that their collaboration could be effectively exercised through the competent official organs of the League and of the Governments concerned. The same resolution asked for the appointment of competent women to assembly delegations and on Government committees of the League and in the higher posts of the Secretariat.

The United Nations Charter went further to give effect to the principles of equality and freedom. An organ of the United Nations, the Commission on the Status of Women, studies the question of discrimination based on sex and discusses questions like the political rights of women, equal pay for equal work, the status of women in private law, the nationality of married women, educational and economic opportunities for women, technical assistance and participation. The United Nations has already adopted a Convention on Political

Rights of Women, and it has been signed by 42 States and ratified by 22. The second Convention on the Nationality of Married Women is intended to provide that a wife's nationality should not be governed by that of her husband, and to ensure more consistency in nationality laws. The Commission, helped by Governments as well as various women's organizations having consultative status with it, and with the co-operation of the Specialized Agencies, is also concentrating on such questions as opportunities for higher education and employment.

In the field of economic development and participation, the question that is in the forefront is that of equal pay for equal work. The ILO convention on this is the first step towards the realization of equality in the field of employment. In India, in all Govenment and Government-sponsored fields the principle is not only accepted but also implemented. Its application by private enterprise is yet to be fulfilled. This is again a matter for the attention of the Government and non-Governmental organizations.

INTERNATIONAL OBJECTIVE

It is worth noting that women's organizations, which work in the international field, have an international objective. Their function is to create a state of mind which will facilitate and increase the participation of women in public life by exercising constant vigilance to see that legislation is implemented in the appropriate manner. They are concerned with not only the free countries where their organizations have affiliates but with problems which are human and, therefore, universal. Their extensive contacts with one another and annual or biennial meetings to discuss common problems have had good results. Today, the demands of women in under-privileged countries or dependent territories do not go unheard. They are no longer cries in the wilderness but appeals to listening sympathetic kindred groups. In fact, the world community of women is getting closer together for promoting equality and peace than it has ever been before.

APPENDIX A

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Country	*Total No. of Women Legislators*	*Diplomatic Service*	*Remarks*
America	16*	200	No discrimination against married women at the officer level. For clerical posts only single women are recruited.
Argentina	—	—	Statistics not available at the moment. No discrimination against married women.
Austria	16	5	No discrimination.
Belgium	15	7	Married women are barred from recruitment in diplomatic service.
Brazil	not known	15	No discrimination against married or unmarried women.
Britain	24	32	
Cambodia	nil	1	No discrimination against married or unmarried women.
Canada	9	20	No discrimination.
Ceylon	4	nil	Do.
China	147	not known	Do.
Czechoslovakia	62	19	Do.
Denmark	16	7	Do.
Egypt	nil	20	Do.
Ethiopia	nil	3	Do.
Finland	30	nil	Do.
France	25	59	Do.
Indonesia	14	7	Do.
Iraq	nil	3	Do.
Italy	35	nil	Do.
Japan	23**	nil	Do.
Mexico	3	127 (20 officials and 107 adm. clerks).	Do.
Netherlands	15	5	Do.
Norway	12	nil	Do.
Pakistan	nil	1	Do.
Philippines	3	6	Do.
Poland	75	8	Do.
Rumania	66	not known	A number of women are elected to local bodies. There are 238 women judges and 18 chairmen of tribunals.
Sweden	38	3	No discrimination.
Syria	nil	3	Do.

*This includes one woman delegate from Hawaii who takes part in debates but does not vote.

*This number pertains to the position before the elections held in July 1956.

Country	Total No. of Women Legislators	Diplomatic Service	Remarks
Thailand	4	not known	Women are appointed in diplomatic service. Exact number not available.
U.S.S.R.	348	not given	No discrimination.
Yugoslavia	60	not known	No discrimination. There are both married and unmarried women in the diplomatic service. Exact number not known.
India	43	6	No discrimination.

APPENDIX B

TABLES CONTAINING INFORMATION CONCERNING COUNTRIES WHICH ARE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND/OR THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES OR PARTIES TO THE STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.

TABLE I

Countries where women may vote in all elections on an equal basis with men

(61 countries)

Albania
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Belgium
Bolivia
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burma
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
Canada
Ceylon
Chile
China
Columbia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador*
El Salvador
Finland
France
Federal Republic of Germany
Greece
Honduras*
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Japan
Republic of Korea
Lebanon*
Liberia
Luxembourg
Mexico
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Pakistan
Panama
Philippines
Poland
Rumania
Spain†
Sweden
Thailand
Turkey
Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
Union of South Africa
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Yugoslavia

*Voting is compulsory for men, voluntary for women.
†There are no general elections for the National Legislative Assembly.

TABLE II

Countries where women may vote in all elections subject to certain qualifications not imposed on men

(3 countries)

Guatemala:	Women must be literate. Voting is compulsory and secret for literate men, optional and secret for women who have the required qualifications and optional and public for illiterate men.
Portugal:	Women are subject to higher educational requirements or, when fulfilling the same tax qualifilations as those prescribed for men, must be heads of families in order to have the right to vote.
Syria:	Women must have a certificate of at least primary education or equivalent, a condition not required for men.

TABLE III

Countries where women may vote in local elections only

(3 countries)

Haiti*
Monaco
Peru

*Under the Constitution of 1950, women are entitltd to vote in all elections within a period not to exceed three years from the last municpal elections, which took place in January 1955.

TABLE IV

Countries where women have no voting rights

(16 countries)

Afghanistan
Cambodia
Egypt*
Ethiopia
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Laos
Libya
Liechtenstein
Nicaragua
Paraguay
San Marino
Saudi Arabia†
Switzerland
Yemen†

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†No electoral rights for men or women.

*Egyptian women got the vote in 1956.

FROM UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY TENTH SESSION
--Document No. A/2952, dated 12 September, 1955.

APPENDIX C

CHRONOLOGY OF COUNTRIES AND YEARS WHEN VOTING RIGHTS WERE GRANTED TO WOMEN

1893	..	New Zealand
1902	..	Australia
1906	..	Finland
1913	..	Norway
1915	..	Iceland, Denmark
1917	..	U.S.S.R., Byelorussian S.S.R., Netherlands, Ukrainian S.S.R.
1918	..	United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Luxembourg
1919		Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, the Saar.
1920		Hungary, the United States of America
1921	..	Sweden
1924	..	Mongolia
1929	..	Ecuador
1930		Union of South Africa
1931	..	Ceylon
1932	..	Thailand, Uruguay, Brazil
1934	..	Cuba, Turkey
1935	..	India, Burma
1937		Philippines
1942	..	Dominican Republic
1944	..	France
1945		Italy, Liberia, Portugal,* Guatemala*, Monaco
1946	..	Albania, El Salavador, Japan, Panama, Rumania, Yugoslavia
1947	..	Argentina, Bulgaria, China, Venezuela, Pakistan
1948	..	Israel, Korea, Belgium
1949	..	Costa Rica, Indonesia, Chile, Syria
1950	..	Haiti*
1952	..	Bolivia, Greece, Lebanon
1953	..	Mexico
1954	..	Columbia
1955	..	Hondurus, Peru, Viet-nam
1956	..	Egypt

*Restricted vote

(From: "UNESCO COURIER", Vol. No. 11, 1955)

THE LAW AS IT AFFECTS WOMEN

Renu Chakravarty

It was regarded a stroke of liberal statesmanship when the British Parliament, by the Act of Settlement of 1781, permitted the application of their own personal laws to Hindus and Muslims in all matters of religion and marriage, succession, inheritance, maintenance and family relations, etc. But it is well known that women's rights under the personal laws are inferior to those of men.

The Constitution of independent India prohibits any discrimination against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Not only that: by one of the directive principles of the Constitution the State is required to endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India. To remedy this inequality, four Acts affecting Hindus have been passed by the first Parliament. It must be remembered that the term Hindu is used in an extended sense and includes Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs in all these Acts.

These Acts are described in some detail in this article. The laws applicable to Christians, Parsis and Muslims, in so far as they deal with marriage , divorce and inheritance, etc., are referred to towards the end.

After 15 long years of struggle, four major bills—the Special Marriage Bill, the Hindu Marriage Bill, the Hindu Succession Bill and the Adoption and Maintenance Bill–forming the core of the Hindu Code Bill, around which has raged a storm of protest and agitation ever since the formation of the Rau Committee in 1941, have, by the first Parliament of the Republic of India, been passed into law.

HINDU CODE BILL

The history of the Hindu Code Bills is a chequered one. In 1941, following several non-official Bills in the Central

Assembly to improve the status of women in the matter of property rights and for giving the daughter a right to inheritance, the Government appointed a Committee, with Sri B.N. Rau as Chairman, to examine the Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act, 1937, and to remove any injustice to the daughter in existing law.

The Committee in its recommendations stated that the best course would be to codify the entire Hindu law relating to marriage and succession, as Hindu women suffered from serious inequities in social law and custom. In Hindu soceity, child marriage and the evils of dowry with its attendant sufferings prevailed. Polygamy existed, while no divorce was allowed. Women could not inherit property. The maximum rights Hindu women knew was for a widow to have enjoyment for life of property left by her husband or son, but she had no right to sell or alienate that property. A woman could not adopt children, and female children could not be legally adopted by anyone.

It was against this background that the Government accepted the recommendation for codifying Hindu law and introduced, as a first step, a Bill on Intestate Succession, prepared by the Committee, in the Legislature in 1942. A joint committee of this House suggested that the Rau Committee draft a comprehensive Hindu code of law. Thus the Rau Committee's Hindu Code was drafted in 1947. In 1948 a Select Committee of the Provisional Parliament considered this Code, but could not get it passed during its lifetime. After the first Parliament was elected it was decided to get the Code through in part. Now at last the various sections of the Code have separately been passed into law.

EVOLUTION OF HINDU LAW

This marks a significant break from the stagnation that had entered Hindu society several hundred years previously. Customs and customary law arising from the needs of a society that was fast becoming outdated stood in dire need of change.

In early times Hindu society was guided by *sharona*, or rules of conduct, which were interpreted by successive generations of commentators as the needs of the times required.

Manu was followed by Yagnavalkya in the 4th century, Narada in the 5th century and Vrihaspati in the 6th or 7th century, and so on. But each successive commentator changed the interpretation as the times changed. Thus we see the original laws of Manu dealing with all aspects of social life excepting marriage have greatly changed to what is present Hindu law. These changes have been greater and greater during the last 250 years under the British.

When the British came there were no definite uniform laws, so when they set up law courts they took the advice of *pundits* to determine local laws and customs. For about 100 years, in different parts of Madras, Bombay and Bengal, a European judge would call two Hindu *pundits* to advise him on any matter relating to Hindus and two *kazis* or *maulvis* for any matter relating to Muslims. Their advice varied. They relied on different ancient commentaries and so the decisions also varied in the different High Courts. No uniformity in Hindu law evolved out of these judicial decisions.

It was only after the independence of India and the framing of our Constitution that the need for a new outlook, not only politically and economically but also socially, began to be keenly felt. This new social outlook was embodied in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights, which stated in :

> ARTICLE 14—Right to equality—The State shall not deny any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
>
> ARTICLE 15—The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making special provisions for women and children.
>
> ARTICLE 16—Equality of opportunity in matter of public employment.
>
> (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
>
> (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the State.

Naturally, therefore, the urge for passing a uniform Hindu Code to guide marriage, succession, adoption and such like matters became irresistible. In free India women are still backward educationally. Superstition, ignorance and oppressive social customs retard their progress. They have not yet become economically self-reliant and it is clear that, without this, women can never become really free and equal partners with men. Nevertheless, as the struggle to achieve these rights continues, the need to establish the equality of women in family life, in marriage, succession, etc., by law has been recognized by the passing of the Special Marriage Act, 1954, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Hindu Succession and Adoption and Maintenance Acts of 1956.

HINDU MARRIAGE ACT

Marriage among the vast majority of Hindus is performed by religious rites. Invocation before the sacred fire or *homa* and the *saptapadi* or the taking of the seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride together before the sacred fire are essential to its validity. There is no need to register a marriage, though anyone so desiring can register it under the Special Marriage Act.

Prior to reform, marriage among caste Hindus or those belonging to what are called "the twice-born classes" within the same *gotra* (agnatic group) was not favoured. Even less could they marry outside their caste or religion. Hindu law did not permit marriages between people in the fifth line of ascent from the father's side and the third line of ascent on the mother's side. This was called *sapinda* relationship and was prohibited. Nor did Hindu law prohibit polygamy.

Divorce was not permitted, for marriages created an indissoluble tie between husband and wife. Child marriages were common. But some practices had been changed here and there, partly by custom and partly by piecemeal legislation. The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act was passed 100 years ago in 1856. By the Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Act, 1946, marriages within the same *gotra* were

validated. The Hindu Marriages Validity Act, 1949, made inter-caste marriages legal. Customs in South and West India permitted marriages within *sapinda* degrees of relationship. A few States like Bombay, Madras and Saurashtra had passed laws enforcing monogamy and allowing divorce. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, made it punishable to marry a boy under 18 years or a girl under 15 years of age.

These efforts, however, could not completely reform the law relating to Hindu marriage. It was necessary to enact a self-contained code on the subject of marriage and to bring about certain other long-felt reforms applicable to all Hindus. This is exactly what the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, sought to achieve.

Conditions for a valid Hindu Marriage

The first thing the Act sought to do was to lay down conditions for the validity of a Hindu marriage. These were:

(1) It has made monogamy the universal rule. Anyone contravening this will not only lay himself or herself open to criminal prosecution but the marriage itself is void.

(2) Neither party must be an idiot or lunatic at the time of marriage. If this is proved a court can grant a decree of nullity.

(3) If a boy less than 18 years and a girl less than 15 years of age is given in marriage, the parents or guardian are liable to be criminally prosecuted but marriage does not become invalidated.

(4) Marriages within *sapinda* degrees of relationship are void and the persons are liable to criminal prosecution, unless such marriages are permitted by custom.

(5) If a girl less than 18 years of age has been married without the consent of her guardian, although the marriage is not rendered void, nor can a court decree nullity on this ground, the persons concerned are liable to criminal prosecution. In a case where it is proved that the consent of the guardian was obtained by force or fraud, the marriage can be declared by a court to be null and void.

On a petition presented by either party to the marriage, a court may declare a Hindu marriage null and void on any one of the following grounds:

(1) that the other party was impotent at the time of marriage and continued to be so till the institution of the proceeding;

(2) that the other party was an idiot or lunatic at the time of marriage;

(3) that the consent of the petitioner or guardian was obtained by force or fraud;

(4) that the other party was pregnant at the time of the marriage by a person other than the petitioner.

Children of void marriages

Children born before a marriage is declared null and void are presumed to be legitimate. Such children can, however, inherit the property of their parents only and cannot claim any rights of succession to any other property by reason of this presumption.

Judicial Separation

The Hindu Marriage Act makes provision both for judical separation as well as for divorce. The grounds are less stringent for judicial separation, since unlike divorce it does not put an end to the marriage but merely excuses the parties from cohabitation. According to the law as it exists today, if either the husband or wife refuses to live with the other without just cause, the aggrieved party may apply to the court which may grant a decree for restitution of conjugal rights. Such a decree cannot be enforced by detention in prison. If the decree has not been complied with for two years or more, the aggrieved party may proceed to obtain a divorce.

Desertion for two years or more before presenting a petition, cruelty, the existence of leprosy in virulent form or venereal disease in communicable form, unsoundness of mind for a continuous period of not less than five years and adultery are made grounds whereon a decree for judicial separation can be

granted by the court. The new law provides that if for two years after a decree for judicial separation the parties remain separate, the aggrieved party may proceed to apply for a divorce.

Divorce

The greatest departure from the old customs and laws in the Act is the recognition and the laying down of certain grounds for divorce. It is true that divorce prevailed among the lower castes as well as the scheduled tribes, but it was taboo for the higher caste Hindus. Certain States such as Bombay, Madras and Saurashtra had, however, in recent times enacted legislation and provided for divorce for all Hindu marriages. But it was only after the passing of the Hindu Marriage Bill in 1955 that all Hindus could seek divorce under certain conditions through the courts.

The grounds which entitle one to apply for divorce are:

(1) adultery;

(2) conversion to another religion;

(3) unsoundness of mind for a continuous period of 3 years;

(4) suffering from a virulent form of leprosy or venereal disease in communicable form for three years;

(5) renunciation of the world by entering any religious order;

(6) not being heard of as alive for a period of seven years or more; and

(7) failure to resume cohabitation two years after the passing of a decree for judicial separation or of restitution of conjugal rights.

An additional ground for divorce has been granted to women where there is a co-wife or co-wives living. A wife can also apply for divorce if, after the marriage, the husband is guilty of rape, sodomy or bestiality.

No petition for divorce can be entertained ordinarily before the expiry of three years from the date of marriage.

Divorced persons may not marry again until the expiry of a minimum of one year from the date of the decree of divorce or till the period prescribed for appeal is over, or any appeal filed is disposed of.

Among the more important of the other clauses of the Act are those dealing with alimony and maintenance. At the time of passing of the decree for divorce the court may grant a gross sum or specified sum to be paid at regular intervals not exceeding the life-time of the applicant, and if he or she remains chaste and unmarried. The amount of alimony will depend on the property held by either party, and may be subsequently varied on application if circumstances point to the need for a change.

The Hindu Marriage Act marks an advance on the rules of alimony generally prevailing in other countries in that alimony can be paid not only to the wife but also to the husband in a proper case.

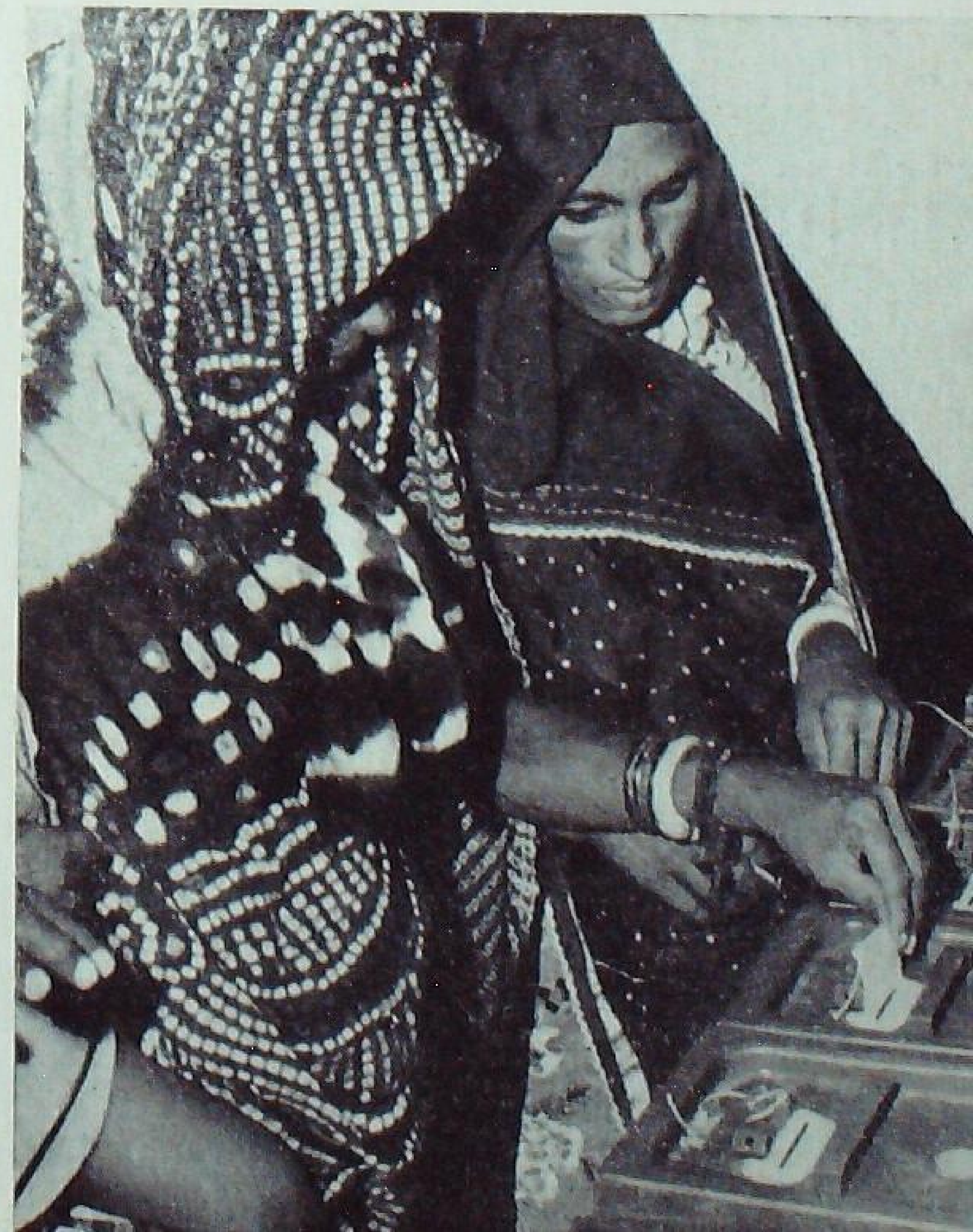
The court may also give such directions as to the custody, maintenance and education of minor children of the marriage consistent with their wishes, if possible. It may also give directions as to any property held jointly by the parties having been presented at the time of marriage.

Imprisonment up to a period of seven years and a fine is the punishment for bigamy. Higher punishment is prescribed if the fact of a previous marriage is concealed from the other party. If there is contravention of the prescribed age limit a fine up to Rs. 1,000 or simple imprisonment of 15 days is prescribed while contravention of the rule prohibiting marriage within the *sapinda* relationship can be punished with a month's simple imprisonment or a fine up to Rs. 1,000.

SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT

Marriages may also be contracted by registration under the Special Marriage Act, 1954. By this Act people of the same or differing faiths may marry without having to renounce or deny their own faith, provided neither party has a spouse

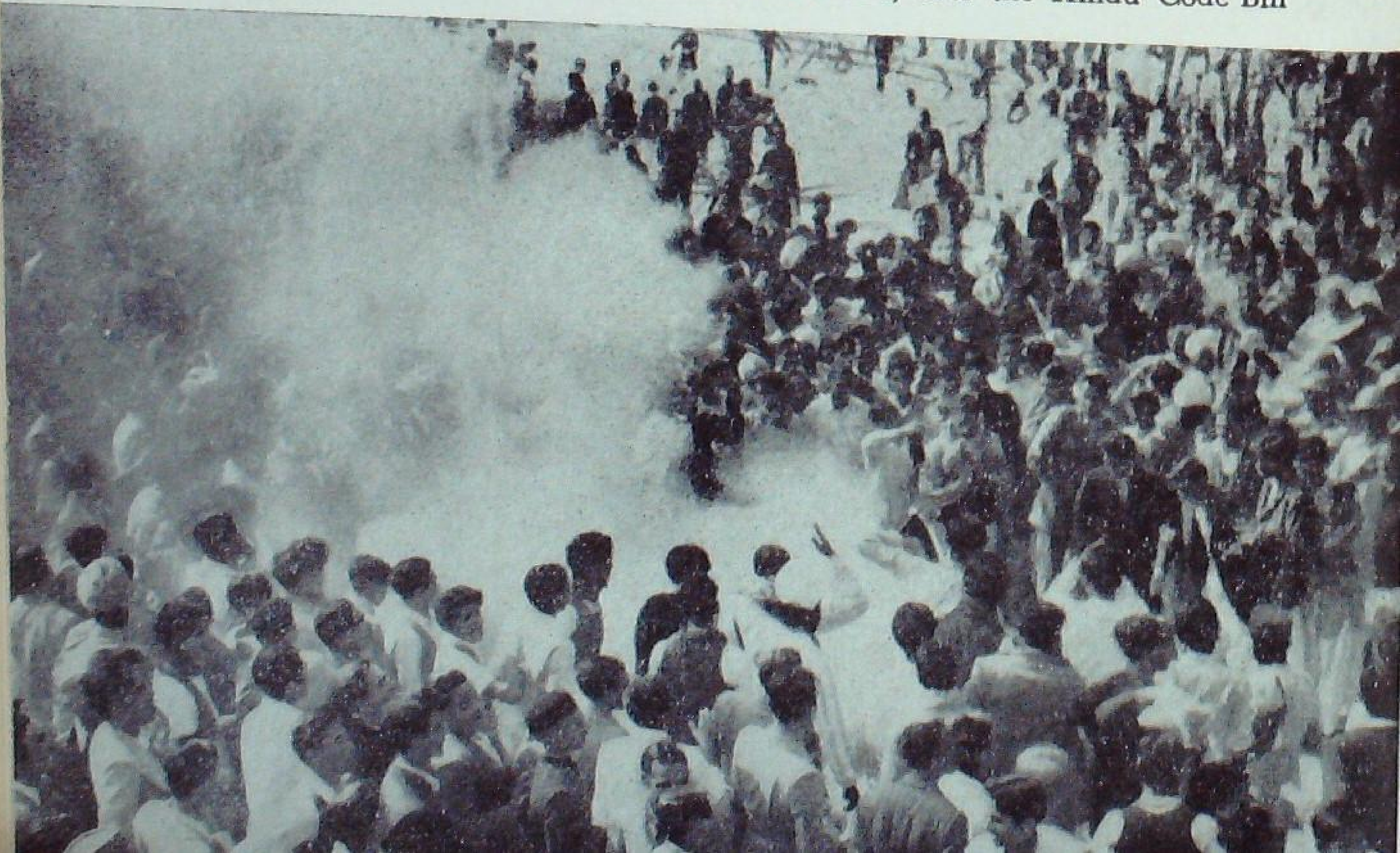
Women voters at the polls



Women from Rajasthan casting their votes

An unusual rural Panchayat Board (or local government) in South India composed entirely of women

Demonstration near Parliament House, New Delhi, over the Hindu Code Bill



living and the man is over 21 years and the woman 18 years of age. They should not be within prohibited degrees of relationship. If any of these conditions is contravened then the marriage will be void.

Succession

A Hindu marriage may also be registered under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, provided the parties accept the consequences of succession under the Act. According to this Act, anyone marrying under it will be presumed to have separated from the joint family, i.e., his share of property will be determined as on the date of marriage to be held as his separate property and thenceforward succession will be regulated by the Indian Succession Act, 1925, and not by the Hindu Succession Act of 1956. Under the former Act the widow will get one-third for herself even in the presence of children or lineal descendants.

By the Special Marriage Act of 1954, divorce is also allowed on not identical but similar grounds to those allowed under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1956. The only notable difference is that under the Special Marriage Act divorce is allowed by mutual consent, and there is no provision to compel a wife to pay maintenance to the husband.

HINDU SUCCESSION ACT, 1956

Till now Hindu women have generally been excluded from the right to inherit property. Nor have they had absolute rights in property devolving on them. Women could only have a life interest, which meant they have not been able to alienate, sell or mortgage it. For the first time a uniform law of succession applicable to all Hindus grants the right of inheritance to the daughter. It is, therefore, regarded as a significant step in achieving emancipation and equality for our women.

Schools of Succession

There are various systems of succession prevailing in our country. The matriarchal system of law exists in Kerala

under several systems known as *marumakatayam*, *aliyasantana*, *nambudiri*, etc., in which descent is traced through females. The daughters share equally with the sons except among the *nambudiris*, where married daughters do not inherit along with the sons and widows.

The *dayabhaga* system of succession is followed in Bengal and parts of Assam. Here the sons share equally only after the death of the father; in other words, sons succeed by succession. In no case do women inherit.

The vast majority of people in India, however, follow the *mitakshara* law of succession. By this law, as soon as a son is born he has a right by birth in the joint family property. All male members of the family form what is known as the "co-parcenary". No female member of the family can belong to the co-parcenary. The share to which a son is entitled is indefinite till such time as he may ask for partition, when his share will be determined by dividing the co-parcenary property equally among all the male members living at that time. It is, therefore, clear that the quantum of share is subject to variation according to the number of male members living at the date of the suit. Under such a system there is no devolution of property but a system of survivorship unique in the world and special to India.

But in *mitakshara* law sons succeed not only by right of birth or survivorship; they also take by succession the self-acquired properties of the father and divide them equally on his dying intestate. The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937 conferred the right to enjoy her husband's share in co-parcenary property for her life-time, without a right to alienate property. This is what is known as a limited estate. In no other case were Hindu women allowed to inherit property.

Under the new Act the daughter, the widow and the mother are all included in Class I and inherit the property of the deceased simultaneously. As between them each takes an equal share, except that where there are more widows than one all the widows together take one share. This is the position with respect to the self-acquired property of the deceased. With respect, however, to co-parcenary property, the son takes

his own share in such property and, in addition, takes a share, as above, in the father's share of such property as well, unless he had separated himself from the co-parcenary during the life-time of the father. This is considered inseparable from the *mitakshara* system and will be relieved when the *dayabhaga* system becomes the rule for all Hindus when the other part of Hindu law are taken up for reform. Nevertheless, the acceptance of the right of the daughter to inherit is in itself a big step forward.

Another step forward is that women will now hold their property absolutely with full rights to sell, mortgage, give away and dispose of as they desire.

Schedules in the Act prescribe the list of preferential heirs. For example, the primary heirs are son, daughter, widow and mother, and they all get shares. The second class of heirs are father, son's daughter's son, son's daughter's daughter, brother, sister and so on and can only succeed if none of the heirs of Class I are alive.

Some special provisions are made regarding the rights of daughters in the family dwelling-house or family business. In a dwelling-house wholly occupied by members of the family, a female heir, although she may be entitled to live there, cannot ask for her share until and unless the male heirs choose to divide it.

Where a female heir inherits an interest in any immovable property or business, if any heir wishes to sell out his or her interest the other heirs will have a right to purchase that interest in preference to outsiders.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, guides succession in cases where a man dies without a will or, as it is called, dies intestate. If a man desires to make a will, he can dispose in any way he likes both his interest in *mitakshara* co-parcenary property and his separate self-earned property.

HINDU ADOPTION AND MAINTENANCE BILL, 1956

In Hindu law, a woman had no right to adopt a child because the entire theory of adoption was based on the belief

that for the salvation and peace of a man's soul a son had to make a spiritual ceremony called *pinda-dan*. So if a man did not have a son of his own he was allowed to adopt a male child. A female child could never be adopted. By the new law of adoption any male Hindu is allowed to take a son or a daughter provided he gets the consent of his wife.

Married women have not been given the right to adopt, but an unmarried woman, a divorcee or a widow, or one whose husband has either renounced the world or ceased to be a Hindu or has been declared by a court to be of unsound mind can adopt a child.

Any child up to the age of 15 years may be adopted provided the father gives the child in adoption with the concurrence of the mother.

But the most important part of this law is the section dealing with maintenance. Hindu law till now decreed that a wife should be maintained by her husband as long as she lived with him. There was no obligation for the father-in-law to maintain the daughter-in-law.

By the new law, a woman can claim maintenance even if she is living separately provided she proves the husband has been guilty of desertion or cruelty, that he is suffering from a virulent form of leprosy, or he has any other wife living, or he keeps a concubine in the same house as his wife, or that he has ceased to be a Hindu or for any other cause justifying her living separately. If she is unchaste or is converted to any other religion her maintenance will cease. This right to maintenance without divorce or judicial separation will be a great help to our women, as most of them do not want to dissolve their marriages and go to court on such issues but may desire to live separately to escape humiliation provided they can maintain themselves.

This Act also makes the father-in-law responsible for the maintenance of his daughter-in-law if she is unable to maintain herself on her own earnings or property, or from her husband, father or mother's estate or to obtain help from her son or daughter. But if the father-in-law has no means to maintain

her from any co-parcenary property he has inherited he will not be forced to maintain his daughter-in-law.

A Hindu male and female must maintain during his or her life-time his or her minor legitimate and illegitimate children as well as aged or infirm parents and unmarried or widowed daughters if they are unable to maintain themselves from their own earnings or property. For the first time women have been recognized as people who have the capacity and responsibility to maintain their parents.

In this way a new attitude towards women is being born in New India. On the one hand the principle of social equality is being recognized, if not fully at least in an important measure. On the other hand, women are also being asked to bear joint responsibility in the burdens of domestic and social life.

CHRISTIAN LAW

The Christian Marriage Act, 1872, consolidates the law relating to the solemnization of marriages of Christians in India. A Christian is defined as a person professing the Christian religion. Indian Christians are those converted to Christianity and their descendants. Any marriage to which one of the parties is a Christian must be solemnized in accordance with this Act. The parties must have notified the Minister or a Marriage Registrar of the intended marriage. One of them should have declared that there is no impediment of kindred or affinity or other lawful hindrance to the marriage and that the consent of the father or guardian or mother has been obtained if one of the parties is a minor. The parties are then given a certificate. A marriage may be solemnized by the Minister in such form or with such ceremony which the Minister considers suitable or by the Marriage Registrar within two months of the date of the certificate, in the presence of two witnesses. The marriage is registered in a marriage book.

The preliminary notice is however not required in the case of Indian Christians. The male and female parties must

be above 16 years of age and above 13 years of age, respectively. (This is now 18 and 15 years, respectively, since the Child Marriage Restraint Act applies to Christians as well). Neither party may have a husband or wife living. Consent of the father is necessary if any of the parties is under 18 years of age. The marriage is entered in the marriage register book by a person who, being a Christian, is authorized by the State Government to grant the certificate of marriage.

Dissolution of Marriage

The Indian Divorce Act, 1869, governs the dissolution of a Christian marriage. The court may decree dissolution of marriage, declare a marriage null, decree judicial separation or decree restitution of conjugal rights or give a protection order, as the case may be. The Act also contains provisions enabling the court to award maintenance to a wife whose marriage has been dissolved. The court has to take into account the fortune of the wife, the husband's means and the conduct of the parties and may award any sum not exceeding one-fifth of the husband's average net income. The court may also make suitable orders for the maintenance and education of the minor children of such marriage from time to time. The Converts Marriage Dissolution Act, 1866, provides for the dissolution of a marriage where one of the parties has been repudiated or deserted by the other on account of the former's conversion to Christianity.

Succession

The Indian Succession Act XXXIX of 1925 governs succession to the property of a Christian dying intestate. A husband has in his wife's property the same rights as she would have in his property if she survived him. Property devolves on the widow or widower, lineal descendants and kindred. The widow takes one-third of the estate in the presence of lineal descendants who, together with kindred, take the balance of the estate. In the absence of lineal descendants the widow takes half and the kindred take the other half. In the absence of both lineal descendants and kindred the widow takes the

whole estate. The children of a pre-deceased child or grand-child take the share which might have been taken by such child or grand-child if he survived the deceased. Among the kindred the father, the mother and brothers and sisters receive, in that order, and in the absence of these near relations the property devolves on remoter kindred, the nearer excluding the more remote in degree.

PARSI LAW

The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, contains the rules applicable to Parsis on those subjects. The parties must not be related to each other within prohibited degrees. A marriage must be solemnized by a priest in the presence of two witnesses, according to Ashirward. The consent of the father or guardian must have been obtained if either party is under 21 years of age. Neither party may have a spouse living. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, which fixes the minimum age for marrige at 18 for boys and 15 for girls, applies here also.

Dissolution of marriage

The Parsi matrimonial courts, aided by delegates on the decision as to facts, may award any of the following reliefs: nullity of marriage, dissolution of marriage, divorce, judicial separation and restitution of conjugal rights.

The grounds on which appropriate relief may be obtained are contained in detail in the Act.

The court may award to the wife such sum or periodical payments for her life as may be found to be just. The court can also make all such interim and final orders as may be necessary with respect to the custody and education of any minor children of the marriage. Where a marriage is dissolved on the ground of the adultery of the wife the court may also order that half her property be settled for the benefit of the children.

Succession

The rules governing succession to the property of a Parsi dying intestate are also contained in the Indian Succession Act.

On the death of a male Parsi, the property is divided among his widow and children. The widow and each son get double the share of each daughter. Where he leaves parents also, the father gets a share equal to half the share of a son and the mother gets a share equal to half the share of a daughter.

On the death of a female Parsi, her widower and children take the property in equal shares.

The children of deceased children also qualify for a share. If the deceased child was a son, his widow and children take his share as if it were his property. In the absence of children the widow gets her share (see below) and the balance reverts to the estate and devolves as part of the intestate's property. If the deceased child was a daughter, her children take her share equally among themselves. This process goes on whatever the number of intermediate deaths.

When there is no lineal descendant, the widow or widower takes half the property; this share is reduced to a third where there is also the widow or widower of a predeceased lineal descendant. In the absence of the widower, a widow of a lineal descendant takes one-third; if there is more than one such widow they together take two-thirds. The residue is taken by the parents, in the absence of parents by brothers and sisters and next by paternal grandfather and paternal grandmother, and so on. It is so taken that each male heir gets double the share of each female heir.

MUSLIM LAW

Marriage in Islam is an unconditional contract made between two persons of opposite sexes. Every Muslim who has attained puberty (the age of 15) and is of sound mind may enter into a contract of marriage. The free consent of both

parties is essential. The proposal and acceptance must be made in the presence of two male witnesses or one male and two female witnesses. The rules of prohibited degrees are based not only on consanguinity and affinity but also on fosterage (fosterage is the act of suckling while under two years of age and this brings on a like prohibition as if the person were a child of the foster-mother). A Muslim woman cannot have more than one husband, whereas a Muslim man may legally have four wives at one time, the injunction of the Prophet being that they must be treated equally. A marriage contravening any of these rules is void. A Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim, whereas a Muslim man can marry any *Kitabia* woman (Christian or Jewess—of a revealed religion, literally "of the Book"). A wife is entitled to get *mahr* from her husband, which is an obligation of a monetary sum fixed at the time of marriage which the law imposes on the husband as protection and security for the wife, payable in the event of desertion or divorce.

The Dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, now governs the dissolution of marriages through the courts. The grounds upon which the dissolution may be obtained are set out in that Act and several additional grounds upon which a Muslim woman may obtain a divorce are recognized.

Inheritance

Muslim women enjoy rights of inheritance to property as full and absolute as those of men. As a general rule the share of inheritance of a female is half the share of male of the same degree. This difference is, however, offset by a claim to dower which every Muslim wife has against her husband and an absolute obligation to maintain which every Muslim husband owes his wife. Mother, wife and daughter qualify for a share under all circumstances. The share of the mother varies from a sixth to a third depending on the existence of other heirs. The wife's share varies from a quarter to an eighth depending upon the absence or presence of children or lineal descendants. The daughter is also a primary heir. In the absence of a son, a single daughter

inherits half the estate and where there is more than one all the daughters together take two-thirds of the estate. In the presence of a son, sons and daughters together inherit the residue in the ratio of 2 : 1. Mohammedan law admits a large number of relations to inheritance and no relative whom Nature has placed in the front rank of affection of an individual is excluded.

* * * *

As yet legislation can only ensure legal equality enshrining this equality in the law books. But to make it a reality a huge movement must rouse the social conscience of Hindu society in particular, spread out as it is over the lakhs of villages of our vast country where life has stagnated for hundreds of years. Indian society is only now awakening to a new life and to new conceptions of freedom. To be able to become true and full partners in this new life, women have begun their march ahead, beginning with their struggle for equal and uniform social laws against many iniquitous customs and laws that have hitherto prevailed. The consummation of that struggle lies ahead. The battle for the Hindu Code on Marriage Succession, Adoption and Maintenance marks the close of a long chapter of struggle and the beginning of a new era.

IN POLITICAL LIFE

Frank Moraes

A distinctive feature of the women's movement in India has been its emphasis on equal as distinguished from special rights. In no sphere—political, economic, social or educational—has any responsible Indian women's organizations demanded special rights for women as opposed to men. What it has consistently asked for is a free field and no favours.

In that sense the movement has never been assertively feminist. The militant suffragists of Edwardian days in Britain have no counterpart in our country, nor did the Indian women's boycott of liquor shops produce as it did in the United States a Carry Nation who, armed with a shining hatchet, gave a new meaning to the term 'demolition' in the bars and taverns of New York. The women's battle for equal rights has been a highly civilized affair—persuasive and persistent, insistent even but never violent or aggressive. The "Indianness" of it all is quite extraordinary.

In the first entry of his *Indian Diary*, dated November 10, 1917, Mr. Edwin Montagu notes : "I received a letter from Jaipur in the vernacular, and a request for an interview from the women of India". Here is one of the earliest hints of feminine activity on the political plane. Mr. Montagu was referring to a letter signed by four members of the Senate of the Indian Women's University, the signatories including Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who described herself as a Bachelor of Music (Madanapalle) and Ramanbai M. Nilkantha who signed herself B.A. (Ahmedabad). Both were destined to contribute, greatly to the progress of women in India.

This was not the first feminine incursion into politics. As the memorandum which the women's representatives submitted later to Mr. Montagu pointed out, the platform of the Indian National Congress had been open since its inception in 1885 to women who spoke, voted and served as delegates at the

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annual meetings of the organization. By a pleasant coincidence a woman, Dr. Annie Besant, was to preside for the first time at the annual Congress session of that year. Interestingly enough, she signalized the occasion by establishing a precedent which the Congress has scrupulously observed since then—that the President chosen for an annual session is President not merely for that meeting but for the whole year.

The deputation which waited on Mr. Montagu and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, on December, 18, 1917, comprised 14 members led by Smt. Sarojini Naidu. In the purely political sphere they asked that when the franchise was drawn up women should be allowed the same opportunities of representation as men. Mr. Montagu's entry in his diary for that day makes piquant reading: "We had an interesting deputation from the women, asking for education for girls, more medical colleges, etc. etc. One very nice-looking doctor from Bombay, Dr. Joshi, was present, the deputation being led by Mrs. Naidu, the poetess, a very attractive and clever woman, but I believe a revolutionary at heart. She is connected by marriage with Chattopadhyay, of India House fame. They asked also for women's votes. The woman who drafted the address, Mrs. Cousins, is a well-known suffragette from London. Cousins himself is a theosophist, and one of Mrs. Besant's crowd. Mrs. Besant herself was there. They assured me that the Congress would willingly pass a unanimous request for women's suffrage."

Such a resolution was in fact passed by the Calcutta session of the Congress presided over by Mrs. Besant. It recorded its "opinion that the same tests be applied to women as to men in regard to the franchise and eligibility to all elective bodies concerned with local government and education".

HOPES DASHED

Unfortunately, these hopes were temporarily doomed to disappointment. The Southborough Committee, which examined the question of franchise, rejected the proposal for

women's suffrage on the specious plea that the social disabilities under which the sex laboured rendered the experiment premature. A strange piece of logic for, far from righting a wrong, it invoked the assistance of one wrong to perpetuate another.

Disappointment was naturally widespread and, spearheaded by the Women's Indian Association, the protest was vocal and voluminous. Behind the Association were ranged such diverse bodies as the Seva Sadan, the Mahila Seva Samaj, the Indian Women's University, the Women's Home Rule League branches and various Congress provincial committees. Authority, however, remained adamant, contenting itself with passing the buck to the future provincial legislative councils, which were left to decide the question of women's franchise.

The battle was now concentrated on the provincial plane. In March 1921, the Madras Legislative Council passed, by a decisive majority, a resolution calling for the registration of women on the electoral roll. Prominent among the women who helped to induce this result were Dr. Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Smt. T. Sadasiva Iyer and Dhanvanti Rama Rau.

Other provinces emulated this example, and by 1926 women enjoyed the franchise on the same terms as men in all provinces so far as elections to the provincial legislative councils were concerned. In April of the same year the Government of India went a step further : it granted women the right to sit in the legislative councils.

Madras, Bombay, the Punjab and the Central Provinces were quick to implement this concession, and the Women's Indian Association lost no time in supporting the candidature of two women nominees in Madras, one of whom was to leave a strong impress on the women's movement. They were Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mrs. Hannan Angelo.

Smt. Chattopadhyay made a spectacular debut in the South Canara constituency, securing 4,461 votes against 4,976 secured by her opponent. Although she was defeated by 500 votes, her performance was legitimately construed by her women supporters as a moral triumph. It enabled the

Women's Indian Association to press for the nomination of a woman to the Legislative Council, and the Madras Government in an imaginative gesture reciprocated by nominating Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi to this august body. Dr. Muthulakshmi was thus the first Indian woman to sit in an Indian legislature and also the first to be elected its Vice-President. She was incidentally the first woman to graduate in medicine from Madras University, where she had a dintinguished career, winning five gold medals and other academic honours. She gave up a lucrative medical career in the cause of women's emancipation as also of social welfare, particularly the care and protection of destitute children and orphans. Her name has a high place in the list of women pioneers.

The lull in the political atmosphere in the late '20s was reflected in the activities of Indian women, which were concentrated largely in the social and legislative fields. But there were rumblings beneath the surface which reverberated in wide spheres. Both the peasantry and the proletariat were astir. The political fever was beginning to infect the country's youth and the appointment of the all-British Simon Commission late in 1927 brought all communities and parties together in a solid opposition front.

FLOODTIDE OF ENTHUSIASM

It was impossible for the various women's organizations not to be affected by this floodtide of political enthusiams, even if for the most part they refrained from active involvement. From 1928 the All India Women's Conference came positively on the scene. From a body dealing with social and educational matters it began to interest itself also in general political matters without any alignment to a particular party—taking in women from various parties but itself taking a strong nationalist stand and demanding equal rights for women in all spheres. There had been women's branches of the Home Rule League also, and an encouraging feature was the non-communal character of the entire women's movement, which

at this stage was representative of almost every creed and community, as evidenced by its leading personalities. Consider the names—Sarojini Naidu, Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Jaiji Jehangir Petit, Herabai Tata, Hannan Angelo, Sadasiva Iyer and a host of others.

Gandhiji, appreciating this trend, had given the movement for women's emancipation his blessing. "I am uncompromising," he wrote, "in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality....Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation."

The Mahatma, however, was initially averse to women taking an active part in the salt *satyagraha*, which signalized the civil disobedience movment of 1940. Nor did he welcome their participation in his historic march to Dandi. Feminine reaction to this ban was prompt and unequivocal, the Women's Indian Association protesting firmly against their exclusion. Margaret Cousins expressed their feelings eloquently. "Gandhiji," she wrote, "has left the care of his *ashram* entirely to women. This division of sexes in a non-violent campaign seems to us unnatural, and against all the awakened consciousness of modern womanhood. In these stirring critical days for India's destiny there should be no water-tight compartments of service. Women ask that no conferences, congresses or commissions dealing with the welfare of India should be held without the presence on them of women. Similarly, women must ask that no marches, no imprisonments, no demonstrations organized for the welfare of India should prohibit women from a share in them."

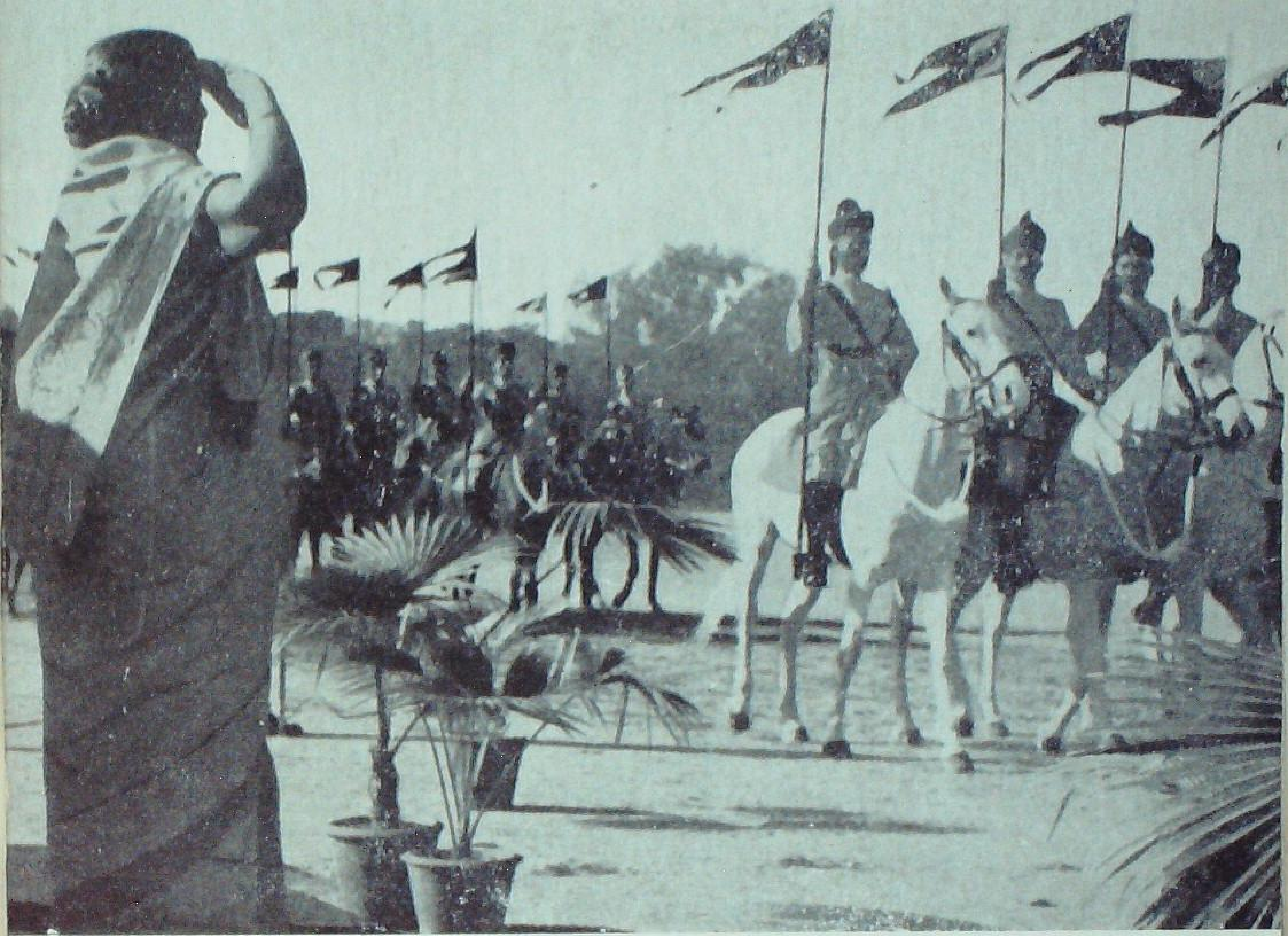
The women were as good as their word. Despite Gandhiji's rejoinder to their protest, wherein the Mahatma advised them to restrict their *satyagraha* activities to the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, feminine eagerness and patriotism refused to recognize any bounds. Smt. Sarojini Naidu was arrested while directing a salt raid at

Dharsana. Earlier, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi had resigned her membership of the Madras Legislative Council, while Smt. Kamalabai Lakshman Rao of Tinnevelly along with Smt. Hansa Mehta of Bombay resigned their office as honorary magistrates. To Smt. Rukmini Lakshmipati of Madras fell the honour of being the first woman to be imprisoned in this campaign. But the roll of honour was long and distinguished, including as it did the names of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Srimati Durgabai, Kamala Nehru and Pandit Motilal's two daughters, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Krishna (later Smt. Krishna Hutheesing) and many others. Indeed, women came out in their thousands, and hundreds of them were arrested. How many, unfortunately, no precise records show. But they played their full share—in processions, demonstrations, picketing and other gestures of organized defiance.

HARSH JAIL TREATMENT

The civil disobedience movement of 1932 following Mahatmaji's return from the second Round Table Conference saw women again in the forefront of the political battle. Of the 80,000 individuals imprisoned in the first four months of the conflict, a goodly number of them, running this time into thousands, were women. In order to deter widespread feminine participation, the Government seemed to take a perverse pleasure in making the conditions of jail life for women political prisoners unduly harsh. Girls of fifteen or sixteen, not out of their teens, were often sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment for merely shouting slogans or gathering in assembly. The older women also came in for their share of tribulation, including Jawaharlal's mother, Swaruprani, who was badly beaten up in a lathi charge in Allahabad, and Gandhiji's wife, Kasturba.

Alongside these somewhat turbulent activities the women's movement had displayed consistent interest in the country's constitutional progress. When, around 1927, Dr. Annie Besant, with Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, canvassed the idea of a



H.E. Sarojini Naidu, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, taking the salute on Republic Day

H.E. Padmaja Naidu Governor of West Bengal, addressing a public meeting

The Prime Minister addressing the Women Legislators' Seminar, Delhi, 1957

Mrs. Indira Gandhi being received by the members of the Northern Railway Labour Union on Labour Social Day

The Prime Minister and Mrs. Indira Gandhi at an official dinner in honour of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. The Maharaja of Sikkim is seated next to Mrs. Gandhi.

The National Congress of Women demonstrating in Calcutta in 1954

"Commonwealth of India Bill", the Women's Indian Association sent a representative to take part in the discussions and was instrumental in inserting the following clause in the Bill's declaration of rights and privileges: "The rights and duties of citizenship shall be without distinction of sex."

In November 1929 the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, announced Whitehall's decision to hold a Round Table Conference, and this inevitably released a spate of activity in which the W.I. A. participated. First in the field was the Madras branch of the Association, which pressed among other things for adequate representation of women at the Conference and on the various committees, commissions and inquiries associated with this body. It also asked for universal adult suffrage. Although the Association had suggested that Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi and Rameshwari Nehru should represent Indian women at the Conference, the Government of India nominated Begum Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbaroyan to the first session. Sarojini Naidu was nominated to the second session, which was attended by Gandhiji. Not all that Begum Shah Nawaz and Mrs. Subbaroyan did on behalf of the women of India was approved of by the Association. These two ladies, in presenting a memorandum urging that more women should be brought on the electoral rolls so as to lessen the disparity between men and women voters, also urged that the wives and widows of property-holding male voters be granted votes. To this latter suggestion the Association was implacably opposed.

Certainly the cause of Indian womanhood did not suffer by default. The W. I. A. was active at every stage of the Conference, and through the three all-India organized women's associations based at Delhi, Madras and Bombay, it worked consistently to see that its point of view was not ignored. In course of time the All India Women's Conference carried on much of the mass contact work among women so vigorously started by the W. I. A. Four women representatives appeared before the Franchise Committee headed by Lord Lothian. This Committee, it will be recalled, had the task of making recommendations which would give the vote to not less than 10

per cent of the total population, as the Simon Commission had recommended, and to not more than 25 per cent, as the Round Table Conference had desired. The women's elected representatives were Smt. Nallamuthu Ramamurthi from Madras, Smt. Maneklal Premchand of the National Council of Women from Bombay, Lakshmi Menon from Allahabad and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur from Lahore. These representatives jointly and individually pressed for adult franchise for men and women and opposed communal electorates, as also reservation of seats for women. "Without exception," noted the Lothian Committee, "the representatives of women's organizations and individual women witnesses demanded that the principle of equality between men and women should be the basis of the new Indian Constitution. The representatives of the All India Women's Conference insisted that this principle could only be applied in the franchise by the immediate adoption either of adult franchise or of a system of indirect election of all adults, and urged this solution upon us."

WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

At the suggestion of the Lothian Committee three women representatives of the all-India women's associations were invited to tender evidence before the Joint Select Committee of the Round Table Conference. The three women representatives were Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi and Begum Hamid Ali, whose demands coincided with the earlier representations made to the Lothian Committee.

Unfortunately, these efforts produced little posititive result. Rather did they register a retrocession from the franchise recommendations made by the Simon Commission, which had recommended the ratio of women to men voters in the proportion of 1:2. The Lothian Committee brought this down to 1 : 4½ and the White Paper which emerged from the deliberations of the Joint parliamentary committee further decreased it to 1:7. In practice, as Margaret Cousins pointed out, this would work out at 1:15 in the Provincial Councils and at 1 : 20 or

even less for the Federal Assembly. It may be noted in passing that the Government of India Act of 1935 enfranchised some 35 million voters, roughly 14 per cent of the then total population, as against 8,744,000 under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

Only in the provinces was the Government of India Act implemented and that only as late as June 1937, when Congress Ministries were formed in six provinces—Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Orissa. Later the rule of the Congress was extended to Assam and the Frontier Province. After the 1936 elections two women were elected as Deputy Speakers: Smt. Anasuyabai Kale of the Central Provinces at Nagpur and Smt. Siphai Malani of the Sind Assembly. Smt. Rukmini Lakshmipati became a Minister in the Madras Cabinet and later in 1937 in Sri Rajagopalachari's Cabinet there was Smt. Jyoti Venkatachalam. These Ministries were to remain in office until early in November 1939, when the Congress withdrew from the administrative field in protest against the British Government's commitment of India to the war without any reference to Indian representatives.

FIRST WOMAN MINISTER

Women took an active part in the elections both in the provinces and for the Central Legislative Assembly, which continued in its old form. Vijayalakshmi Pandit had the distinction of being the first woman to serve as Minister in a provincial government. She was appointed Minister of Local Self-Government and Public Health in the then U.P. Congress Government. Smt. Pandit's career has been more variegated and glittering than almost any other woman's, let alone an Indian woman, for earlier she had served on the Allahabad Municipal Board, where she was elected Chairman of the Education Committee, and she was later to serve as Vice-President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. From 1940 to 1942 she was President of the

All India Women's Conference. The details of her subsequent career are well-known, for with the coming of independence she was to represent India at the United Nations and served successively as Ambassador to Moscow and Washington and later as High Commissioner in London. Smt. Pandit also has the distinction of being the first and so far the only woman to preside over the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Women legislators simultaneously made their appearance in the Central Assembly, among the more notable being Renuka Ray, Radhabai Subbaroyan, who had earlier served on the Round Table Conference, and Ammu Swaminathan, a social worker from Madras.

With the outbreak of the war in September 1939 and the resignation of the Congress provincial ministries, political interest shifted from the legislatures to the broader plane of national politics. Sooner or later, it was felt, a clash with the British Government was inevitable, and this came with Gandhiji's enunciation of the Quit India slogan and the imprisonment of the Congress Working Committee in August 1942. The repressive measures which followed were heavy-handed and their weight was widely felt. Among the multitudes imprisoned in the subsequent struggle were Gandhiji's wife, Kasturba, who was interned along with the Mahatma and died during imprisonment, Sarojini Naidu and Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

Perhaps the most spectacular figure in those days was Aruna Asaf Ali, who went underground and like a feminine Scarlet Pimpernel successfuly eluded the police. Known for her fiery speeches and dynamic character, she had a tremendous mass following all over the country. As a member of the Congress in those days, Smt. Asaf Ali moved to the Socialist camp and, progressing more and more to the Left, finally found herself ideologically very near the Communists. Today she has renounced politics for social work with the Bharat Sevak Samaj.

What followed in India on the political scene is very recent history, but mention must be made of the prominent

part played by many women in the days of the partition riots, when a number of them risked their lives in helping their stricken sisters. Here the work of Achamma Matthai, Sucheta Kripalani, Mridula Sarabhai, Rameshwari Nehru and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay call for special mention.

The period immediately preceding the division of India into the present states of India and Pakistan was marked by frenetic political activity which resulted, after prolonged negotiations, in acceptance of partition, an Interim Government and the setting up of the Constituent Assembly in October 1946. This body was elected by the existing Legislatures to frame the Constitution for Independent India. Many prominent women served on this important body, among whom were Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai, Renuka Ray and Malati Chowdhury.

GENERAL ELECTIONS

The coming of Independence saw India embark on her first general elections in 1952-53. Foreign observers, certain that the world's largest general elections based on adult franchise—and the first in the country—would prove chaotic because of the high rate of illiteracy in the rural areas and the large numbers of uneducated women on the electoral rolls, were astonished at the intelligent grasp of democratic principles displayed by this massive electorate.

In contesting the elections, women candidates toured their constituencies as vigorously as their male opponents, making countless speeches and covering enormous territory, as each candidate in Paliament represents roughly one million people.

Several women stood against other women in the contest, and significantly the chief candidates from New Delhi for the Lok Sabha (Lower House), both in the 1952 and 1957 elections were two women, Sucheta Kripalani and Manmohini Sahgal, though in the last elections Smt. Sahgal withdrew her nomination.

Twenty-three women were elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952, while 19 were elected or nominated, as in the case of the brilliant pioneer in dancing, Rukmini Arundale, to the Rajya Sabha or Upper House. In the two Houses, for the next four years women members proceeded to master parliamentary procedures, contributing important work not only in the field of social legislation, which is always uppermost in the minds of legislators, but in a varied range of subjects from defence to finance.

A brief survey of women's participation in Parliament and the Upper House gives rather a clear picture in microcosm of the range of Indian women's interest in the national scene today. Violet Alva, who at present is Deputy Minister in the important Ministry of Home Affairs, took an active part in debates on defence. Renu Chakravarty specialized in trade union matters and often spoke forcefully from the floor of the House. Dr. Seeta Parmanand, who makes up for her tiny stature with a frightening intensity and drive, organized the Women Legislator's Club and launched into all aspects of vital social legislation, particularly the controversial Inheritance Bill. Jaishri Raiji and Uma Nehru were concerned primarily with reforms and the expansion of the co-operative movement, while Indira Mayadeo took up unemployment questions and cottage industries. In the field of finance and commerce, Tarkeshwari Sinha worked with considerable vigour, and missionary zeal inspired the hard work of Savitri Nigam in the matter of prohibition, which was partially imposed on Delhi State in 1956. While some members, both men and women, did not achieve effectiveness as parliamentarians, Chandravati Lakhan Pal, Lilavati Munshi and Anne Mascarene from Kerala were all effective.

LEGISLATORS' SEMINARS

The need for training in parliamentary methods and technique inspired the creation of legislators' seminars, initiated by Smt. Indira Gandhi, who leads the women's section

of the Congress party. Among prominent legislators carrying out this project is Lakshmi Menon who today holds the responsible post of Deputy Minister of External Affairs. Smt. Menon, whose work at the U. N. Commission on the Status of Women is well known, is very active in the Rajya Sabha, especially at question time. A brilliant and lucid thinker, her answers are models of economy and exactitude.

The 1957 elections took 193 million people to the polls and 27 women were returned to the Lok Sabha out of a total membership of 500, with 23 in the Upper House. Out of 342 women who stood for the State Assemblies, 195 were elected out of a collective membership of 3,000. This figure compares most favourably with similar representation in the United States, Britain and France.

Notable among the new members of Parliament are Renuka Ray, politician and social worker, formerly Minister of Rehabilitation in the Govermment of West Bengal, Parvati Krishnan, a Communist member who is a brilliant debater, Violet Alva, who has among other things a fine journalistic background and is now a Deputy Minister, and Sahodra Bai Rai, whose broken arm and gunshot injuries recall the heroic role she played during the non-violent march on Goa in the last *satyagraha* movement, when she was fired on by Portuguese troops. Sudha Joshi, who was likewise among the unarmed batches that went towards the Goan border in an effort to liberate Goa, was also wounded and is at present languishing there in jail.

As the elections brought women into prominence, so too did they rise to positions of high office. Earlier India had seen its first woman Governor with the appointment of Sarojini Naidu as Governor of the enormous State of Uttar Pradesh. By an interesting coincidence, her daughter Padmaja Naidu was to be the second woman Governor, this time of the State of West Bengal. The Union Cabinet included a woman representative in Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, who was Minister of Health until the Cabinet was reshuffled in April 1957 following the last general elections. The Deputy Minister of Health, Smt. Chandrasekhar, was an able deputy.

Women were also active in the State legislatures and ministries, Dr. Sushila Nayar being successively the Health Minister of Delhi State and Speaker in the Delhi State Legislature while Smt. Renuka Ray, as Minister of Rehabilitation in West Bengal, was charged with the highly onerous task of coping with the refugees from East Pakistan.

Since the last elections, women Ministers and Deputy Ministers have increased in number. In Assam, Usha Borthakar is Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Rural Development and Maternity and Child Welfare. Bihar, which used to be considered a "backward province", has 32 women legislators in the State Assembly and two Deputy Ministers—Jyotirmoyee Devi, in charge of Welfare and Health and Nima Khatun Haider, in charge of Jails and Transport. Nirmala Raje Bhonsle is Deputy Minister of Education in Bombay State. Kumari K. R. Gouri is Minister of Revenue and Excise in Kerala. Rani Padmavati is Minister of Health in Madhya Pradesh, where 27 women have been elected to the State Legislature. In Madras, where women have played a pioneer role in public affairs as in Bengal, Smt. Lourdammal is Minister of Local Administration and Fisheries. In Mysore State Grace Tucker is Deputy Minister for Education, while in Orissa Basanta Manjari Devi is Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation. Health claims the attention of women in the Punjab with Dr. Prakash Kaur as Deputy Minister, and in Uttar Pradesh Prakashwati Sood is Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. In Bengal, Purabi Mukharjee is a Minister of State concerned with Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, and Kumari Maya Banerjee is Deputy Minister.

South of the Narmada women are particularly prominent in the local field and it is interesting to note that they are to be found even at the *panchayat* (village government) level, one *panchayat* board in South India consisting exclusively of nine women. With our Five Year Plans, the political and economic consciousness of rural India has grown greatly and women, through community development work and other village organizations, are doing much to stimulate it.

Oddly enough, the political consciousness of an awakened electorate has done much to stimulate development work at many levels, for politics and political meetings since the revolutionary period have attracted enormous crowds and still do. Women in political parties have also helped to awaken social consciousness, for in India social betterment and amelioration is the most important plank in all political platforms.

PRE-EMINENT WORKER

Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister's daughter, is pre-eminent as a worker of this type. Reflecting her father's high sense of service and duty, coupled with a very forward-looking approach to problems, she has been a most valuable member of the Congress Working Committee along with Srimati Kutiamalu, and has been responsible for organizing the Women's Section of the Congress party and innumerable women's work camps for training workers: this, of course, in addition to acting as official hostess for the Prime Minister, intense election campaigns, public speaking in remote and inaccessible parts of the country and initiating all manner of projects for improving the lot of children. Modest, passionately sincere and hard-working, her influence is far greater than many people realize and penetrates to every aspect of national life.

Apart from the Working Committee itself, women playing an important role in the Congress organization are too numerous to mention individually, though an example of an intense and dedicated worker is Subhadra Joshi, President of the Delhi State Congress.

Other political parties also have women serving on their executive. While there is no woman on the small, tight Politburo of the Communist Party, Aruna Asaf Ali served on the General Committee, while Renu Chakravarty and Parvati Krishnan are active members. In the former Socialist party, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was a great force, while Sucheta Kripalani changed her allegiance from the Praja Socialist

Party back to the Congress in 1956. Srimati Alamelumma is on the National Executive of the Socialist Party of India.

While Indian women rose to prominence in the political sphere due to both ability and the impetus of the national movement for freedom, the possibility exists that in the years to come the contest will become more intense in an atmosphere of rigorous political competition. These are processes of democracy for which their training and experience in the decade since independence has given many a sound foundation for active participation in the life of the nation.

THE FAMILY AND THE HOME

Tara Ali Baig

A great deal has been written about India's peculiar customs and superstitions, her caste system and backward women. A great deal has also been written about the serenity of India, her message to mankind and her contribution to peace and spiritual equilibrium. But because the problem is vast, complex and covers a span of history of approximately 5,000 years, no generalization about the sub-continent can be anything but a half-truth.

India is as complex as the architecture of any of its temples. This is due to the impact of history and the synthesis of many religions, races and ways of life functioning independently of one another; and again to the clear-cut divisions in Hinduism itself of caste (and later the joint family system) which arose some 5,000 years* ago in the first shattering impact of the Aryan way of life upon the indigenous Dravidians.

Aryan society was apparently patriarchal, a society of nomads under the leadership of a constantly moving paternal force around which power was centred. This power was vested in the tribal chief, king, priest or father.

Dravidian civilization, from the meagre and inadequate knowledge we have of that period, was urban. Its centripetal force was apparently the creative mother-goddess burgeoning with life and steadfast as the seasons. The matriarchal system, the last vestiges of which remain today in Malabar in South India (and in Sumatra, Indonesia, whither it travelled with Indian traders who settled there before the 1st century A.D.), was the antithesis of the patriarchal system. It was inevitable that they clashed.

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* Authorities vary considerably over this figure from 1,500 B.C. to 4,000 B.C.

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GROWTH OF HINDUISM

The extraordinary fusion of these opposite cultures took perhaps a thousand years to accomplish, and out of it grew a complex system of thought and life that is known today as Hinduism. It was not a religion in the accepted sense with dogma and book, but a way of life into which one was born and which had something of the inevitability of nature. The sacred books from the *Vedas* to the *Brahamanas*, *Shastras* and *Upanishads* were not revelations like the Bible and the Quran but texts guiding human beings from birth to death and even beyond.

Hindu thought centred in the idea that *Dharma* is the natural force or principle that binds mankind together in a common unity which, like a wheel, is never static and has no end or beginning. Our national symbol of the *Asoka chakra* thus most powerfully expresses the concept of *dharma* which is not merely a religious idea but a recognition of the physical laws which govern the Universe and all it contains, and of which man, by his conduct of law and worship, forms part.

On the worldly plane, because the importance of the individual in India has always been secondary to the family, the social structure, no matter what wars, invasions or conquests took place, has never been destroyed. Whatever their defects, both the caste system and the joint family system have undoubtedly contributed to this stability. The personal happiness, the development of the individual and even the actions of the individual were all made subordinate to the family and to society. It is understandable, therefore, why sacrifice has been considered one of the highest values in Hindu society, making admiration for renunciation and asceticism so widespread and creating such a virtue of non-possession.

THE JOINT FAMILY

A society based on the demands of a rigid form of community life implies considerable sacrifice on the part of its

members, both male and female. In the structure of a joint family, where three or four generations may live under one roof, the elders invariably dominate. A man must renounce a life of his own, and in very orthodox families even the money he earns automatically reverts to the joint family treasury. There is little privacy for anyone and it is, therefore, inevitable that rules of conduct and duties are strictly enjoined, for otherwise a community of people living close together could not function at all.

This is the reason why women accepted their restricted role in life with such docility. While such a system has frequently been hard on the individual, stifling personality and even leading to grave injustice and ill-treatment, the credit side has been considerable for it has provided the greatest possible insurance and solidarity for the clan. Illness, loneliness, loss of parents, widowhood, handicaps and old age were no longer problems of the same magnitude in a group as in the single family unit. The joint family, however, imperfectly gave shelter and protection. Relations always had a home to go to in times of distress, the old never felt useless and abandoned, and living expenses were greatly reduced by the economic factors of a common roof and kitchen.

Brihaspati calls this "*Eka Pakena Vasatam*" or an association sharing the same kitchen and performing sacred duties together before the sacred fire. The joint family, moreover, since it was a self-sufficient unit, could neither be rocked nor disrupted by political upheavals, a factor of the utmost importance in medieval times. This combination of clan self-sufficiency and the individual's habit of sacrifice were and continue to be a factor for the greatest possible social strength and solidarity.

MINORITY GROUPS

In varying measures, this Hindu form of living extended to other communities as well, though more from necessity than from their own religious injunctions, because Hinduism

being based upon family and caste tended to be exclusive of other families and castes. The other communities therefore, developed reliance upon kinsmen rather than upon society, and India became a series of non-interlocking social groups, which traded, were friendly and lived side by side but did not interfere with one another.

The pattern of life in India is based predominantly upon the Hindu pattern because it forms the largest majority of some 304 million souls. The largest of the minority groups are the Muslims, who number 35·4 million, followed by 8.2 million Christians and 6.2 million Sikhs. Jains and tribal peoples number 1 1/2 million each but many authorities place tribal peoples at 20 mi lion, so the discrepancy must arise in tabulating castes instead of tribes. There are two small communities—100,000 Parsis or Zoroastrians and 26,000 Jews, largely of Beni-Israel descent. These are closely knit minority groups. These figures are from the census of 1951, but a more recent assessment of population places Muslims at 40 to 45 million, tribal people at 25 million, Buddhists at over a million and Parsis at 80,000. With such diversity of races and cultures, it is hardly remarkable that any generalization about India is liable to present a distorted picture.

Hinduism naturally has always had a profound effect on the entire country, extending in modern times even to international affairs. Oddly enough, this was because Hinduism, unlike other religions had no missionaries, no one doctrine to propagate and because one was born a Hindu and not made one. The individual being unconcerned with the life and faith of others, interference in the customs and way of life of non-Hindus did not exist. This led to the extraordinary synthesis of culture which makes up modern India, and to the doctrine of *Panch Sheel*, the basis of India's foreign policy.

INFLUENCE OF ISLAM AND THE WEST

Synthesis of many racial patterns took place over the centuries, Islam making perhaps the greatest single impact upon the Indian way of life. It introduced new forms of

music, dancing, painting literature, architecture, language, cooking and handicrafts with a much greater range and skill than existed before the successive invasions of Arabs, Turks, Mongols and Moghuls. Likewise, when peace reigned again, there was a great revitalization of the systems of land revenue, law and order and administration, all of which in time have become accepted as wholly Indian.

The impact of the British was also very considerable. The inevitable progress of industry and technology during their rule accounts for the development of another pattern of living which is usally called Western. This too is as Indian now as any other cultural adaptation of the past, having affected our language, public institutions, architecture, education, way of living and political structure.

To understand the pattern of the home and the family, evolving as it has been from the diverse influences of the past, it is necessary to break this down first into its component parts on the basis of religion, since in all ancient societies religion made custom and law. Secondly, we have to examine briefly how it operates in the different economic levels of society, both rural and urban.

RELIGIOUS RULES AND SACRAMENTS

The Hindu view of life can be deemed essentially sacramental, with great emphasis upon continuity. Each life and how it is lived has a direct bearing upon a future existence. Man is not born upon this earth for his pleasure, but for a purpose which lies within his will to bring to fruition. His life, from birth to death, is carefully prescribed in the *dharmashastras* in terms of *samskaras* or sacraments (more literally, tendencies which mark, in the case of men at least, each of three clear phases of his passage through life, each *samskara* being preceded by a symbolic sacrifice called *homa*).

On the basis that marriage is part of one's obligation towards ancestors and the community, *garbhadana*, or the act of procreation, is the first of the sacred *samskaras*.

Pumasavana is the second ritual, conducted in the third month of conception, to ensure the birth of a male child who alone can rescue the souls of dead ancestors from hell.

On the birth of the child, the rite of *jatakarma* is performed by the father, placing his hand on the child's head and imploring the Gods to grant long life and wisdom.

On the 12th day, the ceremony of *namakarna* or name-giving is performed. The name chosen should indicate the *varna* (caste) of the child.

When four months old, there is a curious yet significant ceremony when the child is presented to the greatest power governing the world—the Sun. In the sixth month *annaprasana* or the feeding of the first solid food takes place. At this ceremony also, in some communities, various objects representing different trades are put in front of the infant, and the one he selects is supposed to indicate his future occupation.

Childhood now being well-established, the next ceremonies are *karnavedha* or ear-piercing and *caula* or tonsure of the head, which takes place from the first to the fourth year. This marks the end of the *samskaras* governing childhood and ushers in the next phase in the life of a human being. This second phase, however, is strictly reserved for men and constitutes the most important stage in his development. Marked by solemn rites and prayers, *Upanayana* ceremonies herald the rebirth of the individual and his initiation into the spiritual life of his forefathers. It is the beginning of his official acceptance into the world of learning through Vedic wisdom.

A Brahman generally performs this ceremony at the age of 16, a Kshatriya at the age of 22 and a Vaishya at the age of 24. The Sudra, the outcaste, and the woman, being concerned, according to ancient thought, purely with the material aspects of life, were barred from participation in the spiritual. Only a few remarkable women ever crossed this barrier, or perhaps even wanted to, in India's history.

For the rest, the most important ceremonial is *vivaha*, through which a couple enter the important phase of becoming householders. They vow to continue the race, and together light the sacred fire and keep it lit by their joint devotion. The

main significance of the nuptial ceremony is that the man, having been initiated into learning and the life of the spirit in the *upanayana* rite on the completion of his studies in ancient times (in the strictly celibate atmosphere of learning in the *ashram* of his teacher), returns to take up his worldly life as an essential part of his duty to society.

His wife, on the other hand, having gone through the same ceremonials from the time of birth (except the *upanayana* rite), accomplishes her most solemn sacrament at the time of marriage. This is how the concept arose in Hindu society that a man's task is a dual one—his duty to his ancestors in his wordly life and his duty to the needs of the spirit, to which he must turn all his energies as soon as his family cares are over.

In a woman's case, her traditional task is strictly to help a man accomplish his duties. So while his emphasis is on spiritual life, to a woman her husband is her lord. The wife, it must be understood, is considered a very important source of the accumulation of *dharma* to gain release for the human soul in the endless chain of birth and re-birth. Women like Kasturba Gandhi and Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, have been widely revered for their adherence to a particularly Hindu form of devotion which was an integral part of their husbands' greatness.

The wife is described as "the inspiration of spiritual merit, for wealth earning and gratification of the senses". Significantly enough, since home is a sacred trust vested in the householder, love and sex life are placed third in order of importance in marriage. This emphasis on the sacraments explains why Indian women are apparently docile and undemanding and, from the western point of view, appear to accept an inferior status in life.

The last ritual is *anvesti*, which is performed at the time of death and marks the funeral rites attending upon a soul entering the realm of ancestors. The Hindus invariably cremate their dead, as the body is considered merely the cast-off garment of the soul. The ashes are then thrown upon the waters of a river, preferably at some holy place such as Banaras or Hardwar, or the confluence of sacred rivers. Women

do not normally accompany the funeral cortege to the place of cremation.

CHILD MARRIAGE

It will be seen from these clearly laid down rituals that sacrament plays a very important part in the family life of the vast majority of people in India. This sacramental aspect also explains why girls were generally married young, though the sacred texts are rather contradictory on this point. It would seem that in ancient times girls were not married at a tender age, but over the centuries different law-givers imposed attitudes that not only became generally accepted but also increasingly rigid.

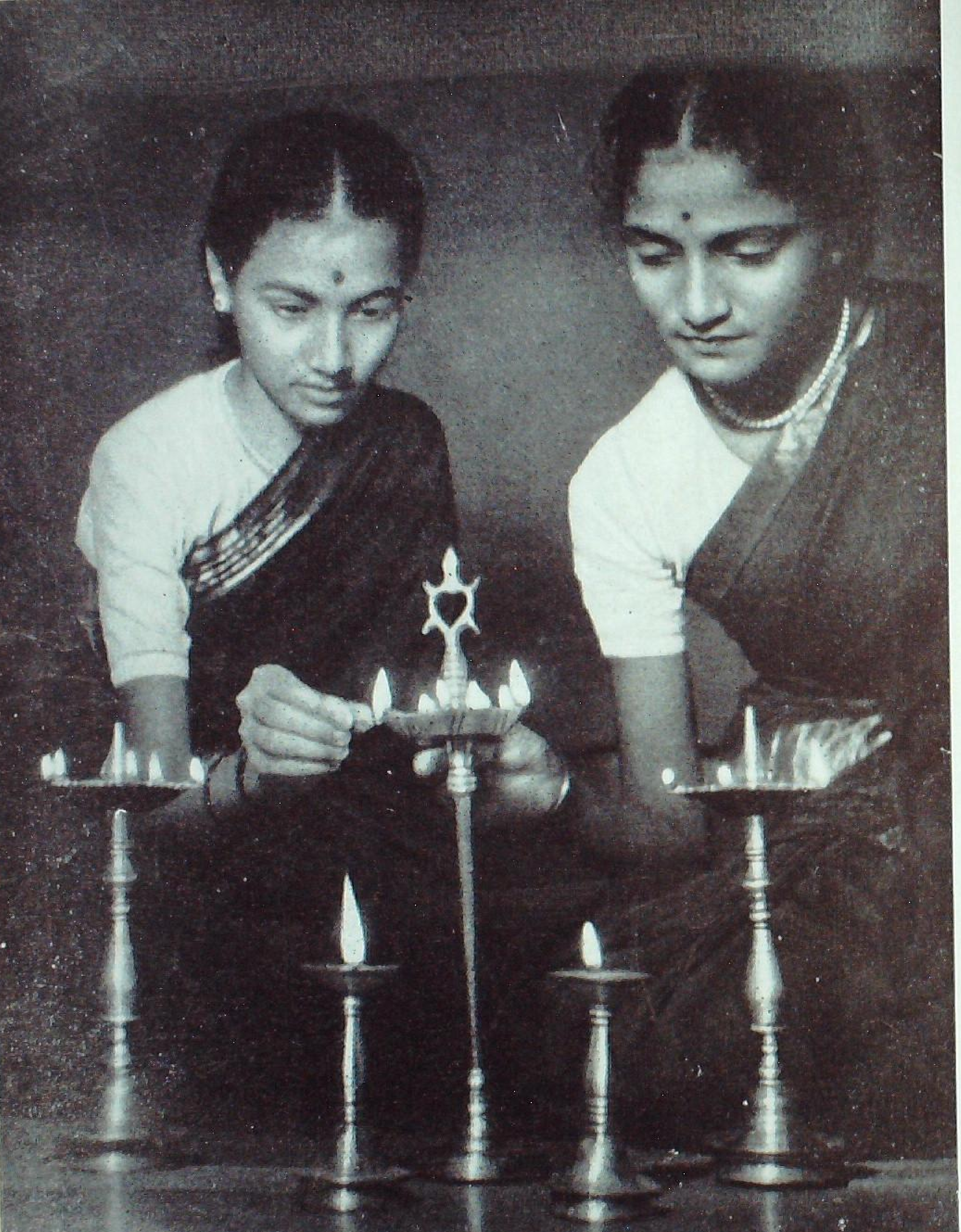
Taken in the context of Indian belief that woman is pure by nature but weak and incapable of withstanding the offer of love (a curious fusion of the matriarchal concept of the potent mother goddess and the patriarchal symbol of the father protector), the anxiety of a parent upon a girl reaching puberty led, naturally enough, to pre-puberty betrothal which had all the sanction and permanence of the marriage contract without cohabitation. It may be argued also that as marriages were primarily arranged and a girl had to adjust both to the husband and his family, child marriage was desirable since a young girl could adjust more easily than a grown-up to new conditions. In some cases, the bridegroom was young and leading a celibate life as enjoined by the *shastras* during the normal period of study while the bride was living with her own parents. It must be recalled here that the *shastrakaras* demanded chastity of men equally with women prior to actual marriage.

It was the decay of meaning in social customs that led to the abuses of child marriage, to the horrible treatment of widows and to *sati*, where women burned themselves upon the pyres of their husbands. Then came the move to introduce reforms in the middle of the last century. These reforms were carried on with tireless zeal by men like Raja Ram Mohan

A Punjab village woman in her home

Lighting lamps in worship at the household shrine

A Kashmir scene : a samovar of hot tea brought by a Kashmiri wife to her husband working in field



The Diwali festival in a South Indian home

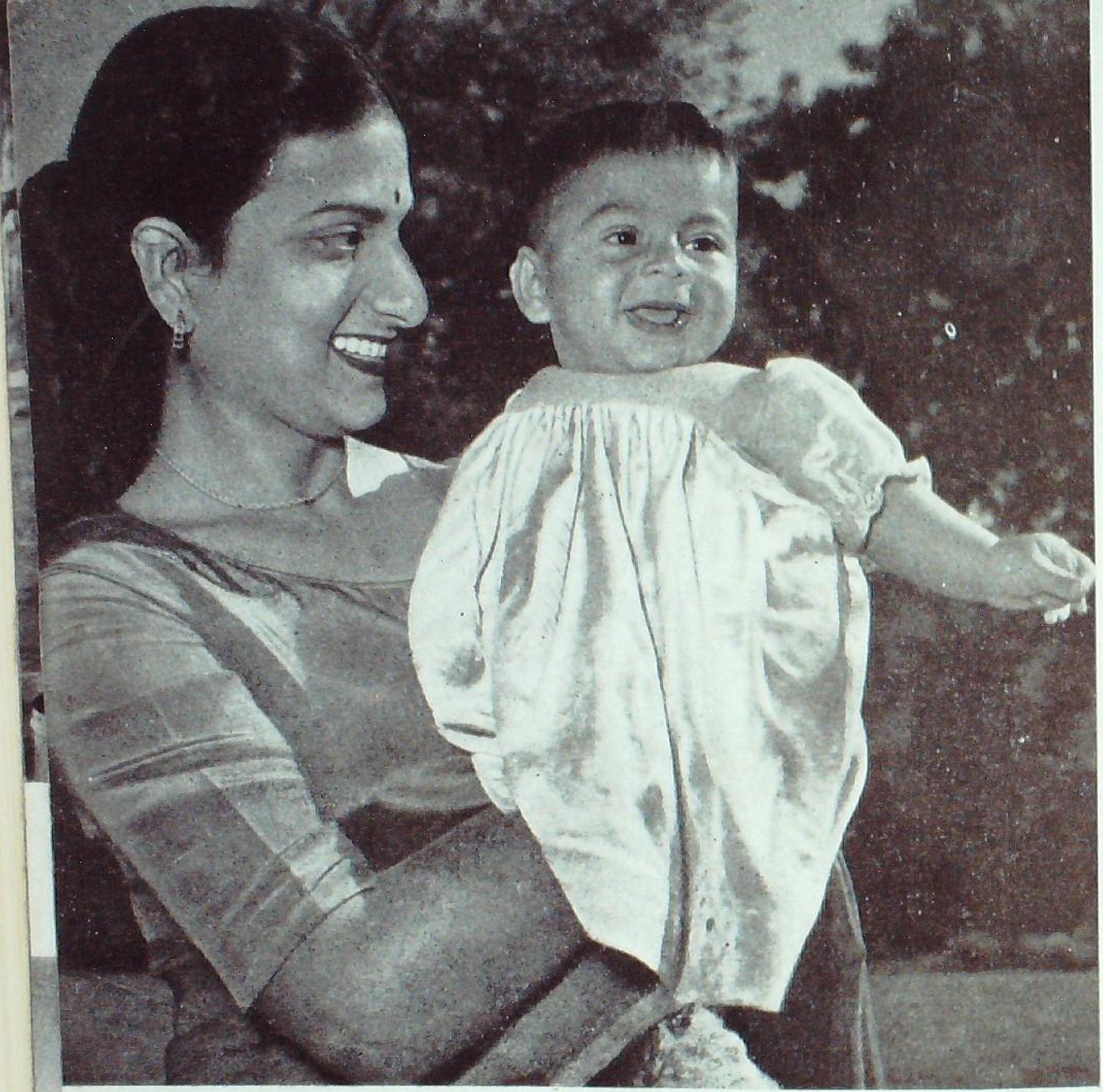
Methods of cooking—
the modern housewife—.

Bread-making in the traditional way

Evening in the village home

Evening in the modern home

Pouring oil on the children's heads preparatory to the bath



A modern mother and child

A village mother and child

Wedding scene—teasing the groom

A Parsi wedding

Saptapadi, the seven steps to happiness, in a Hindu wedding

Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. The latter, in 1856, introduced the first Widow Remarriage Act. In 1891, Manmohan Ghose toiled to raise the age of consent in the Bengal Legislature above 10, and the struggle continued up to the introduction of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929 by Harbilas Sarda which changed the face of India and ushered in, incidentally, the emancipation of women generally.

HIGHER MARRIAGE AGE

In present times, the actual age of marriage has definitely been raised during this generation. It is interesting to note that surveys during the 1951 census showed that the percentage of unmarried males of 15 years of age and above was 20.3, while 6.4% females were unmarried at the same age. Likewise, in a survey of 9 1/2 million people, 2.6% of those under 15 were married or widowed.

Education of women, begun seriously in the last century, has been a predisposing cause for later marriage and, on the whole, there is a preference for union within the same caste group, partly because it keeps money in the family and partly because girls marrying into different social patterns of living have a difficult time accommodating themselves to the new demands made upon them.

This general analysis applies to almost all groups in India, though naturally a more conservative picture persists in rural areas and among illiterates. An interesting factor to remember about India is that it is one of the few countries where men predominate over women in the ratio of 5,133 males to 4,867 females in every 10,000. There are, therefore, few unmarried women and monogamy is generally the rule, as was actually laid down in the *Vedas*. There is remarkably little sense of insecurity in the minds of women either about the prospect of getting married even if they are not endowed with good looks or intelligence, or in their ability to hold their husbands once they are married. The parents in fact do much more worrying, since most marriages are

planned as a social obligation by the elders, and not getting a girl married means she remains something of a liability.

EXPECTATION IN MARRIAGE

One great advantage, however, of the emphasis upon duty to society rather than personal happiness is that expectation in marriage is greatly reduced and, proportionately therefore, disappointment in the partner. The result is that even if people are unhappy together, it does not normally lead to separation or divorce. Provided the wife carries out her duties of preparing good food with an eye to careful budgeting, pleasing her husband and attending to his needs and rearing children with a proper respect for their elders, not much more is expected of her. If she herself is not very happy she usually inclines more and more to religion, and this is looked upon as a very proper development.

The man, because he, by the sanction of the *samskaras*, is dedicated to carrying out his prescribed duties of a householder and, if possible, having a son to relieve him of his burden of duties to his ancestors, automatically continues to lead a masculine existence in which his wife and family only form a part. In the case of a great many Hindus, a man may retire from the world altogether once the householder's stage is accomplished and take to a life of meditation, often moving from one sacred place to another, sometimes accompanied in his devotions by his wife. At that stage they both lead a celibate life, devoting all their energies to their search for self-realization.

At the back of the minds of many people of all levels of society this thought lies very near the surface, because the breaking of the chain of continuing re-birth on this earth can only be accomplished by hard work on the part of the individual. This is probably the root of India's preoccupation with the spiritual, and undoubtedly not only a reason for existence but a powerful motivation for leading a life in which the material is of diminishing importance.

RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS OF MINORITY GROUPS

While these values exercise considerable influence upon the majority of Indians, the minority groups of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Jews and tribal peoples have social customs that are entirely different.

As far as this operates upon the life of the householder, it can be said that the family functions in very much the same way for all communities at specific economic levels and, therefore, in a sense, economics makes the overriding differences. But differences also exist in the values and customs imposed by religion and custom. These influence duties and responsibilities borne by men and women, their participation in festivals of all kinds which continue to be the main source of mass recreation, and the legal implications of marriage, divorce and inheritance, which affect home life.

MUSLIMS

Islamic law and custom is on the whole far less complex than the Hindu. As in all monotheistic religions, the rules of life are based upon the will of God and daily ceremonies tend not to be sacramental. Even marriage vows are a contract between the parties and this naturally conditions family life and observance. By and large, all important stages of human life tend to be celebrated rather than observed (like the Hindu) with ritual, prayer and sacrifice.

Among Muslims, in the seventh month of pregnancy, relations and friends are invited to a night of music and entertainment. The mother-to-be is adorned with new clothes, flowers and perfume, is surrounded by gaily-dressed women and there is considerable merriment. Confinement, likewise, is an excuse for further celebration and, if means permit, childbirth is heralded with great festivity.

On the fortieth day, known as *chilla*, up to which time a mother is looked upon as unclean, gifts are exchanged with much feasting, while male relatives are invited to prayer

over great platters of *pulao* eaten in the name of the Prophet. On the *chilla* night, the mother takes the new baby to count the stars, a poetic symbol of his unity with all created worlds, and fruit, a symbol of fertility, is heaped in her lap. In the months thereafter festivities mark, successively, the naming of the child, the first hair-cutting ceremony, the child's seventh month of life (seven being a mystic number to many faiths), and later the cutting of its first tooth, and crawling. One of the most important ceremonies connected with Muslim youth is *aquiqa*. It commemorates the sacrifice by Ibrahim (Abraham) of his son Ismail (Issac) a symbol of the love of God carried even to the sacrifice of a beloved son. In all the Islamic world, the boy's head is shaved during this ceremony, a goat is slaughtered and the meat distributed without breaking the bones.

In the case of a girl, there is the ceremony of piercing the ears, and later for a boy the ceremony of *bismillah*, after which he is sent to school to learn the wisdom of the Holy Quran. Between 7 and 14, the young male undergoes circumcision, for which there is also a feast for relatives and friends and the boy is given colourful new clothes and an elaborately embroidered cap.

All these festivities clearly indicate the importance of the child in the home and family. For after childhood there are no further rituals except marriage and, finally, the ceremonials connected with death. Marriage among Muslims has always been a contract in which a woman's economic rights are guaranteed by the system of *mahr*, a sum settled upon her by the husband at the time of the wedding and which he is bound to give her in case of divorce, separation or desertion. At the time of death, the inheritance is shared in the proportion of two to one by sons and daughters, with a sixth part reserved for the wife—a very enlightened law in view of the fact that this attention to women's rights was observed by the Prophet as long ago as the 7th century A.D.

Regarding the institution of marrying more than one wife, Islam permits four wives with the strict injunction that they must be treated equally. Hinduism actually lays down no numerical bar, and where a man took another wife a Hindu

woman formerly had no recourse to justice, though custom always provided her with the right to maintenance and the right of *stridhana*—the property she brought to marriage from her parents. In practice, however, monogamy is now the rule rather than the exception for all communities, and only Princes have tended to keep many wives, frequently for dynastic reasons. Some hill communities, who are generally Hindu, are also polygamous in cases where there are more women than men, and for economic reasons, too, since a wife is a more devoted worker than a hired hand on a farm !

In the rituals concerned with death, Muslims, like all people who are governed by the laws of Moses and erect tombs over graves, have an elaborate ceremonial and burry their dead. The most splendid of these tombs in India is undoutedly the Taj Mahal.

BUDDHISTS AND JAINS

Buddhists and Jains belong to very ancient religious groups which branched off from Hinduism 600 years before Christ. Although Buddhism originated in India and spread all over the ancient world from Mesopotamia to Japan, there are only about 500,000 Buddhists in India today (though with the recent revival of Buddhism this has increased). Gautama Buddha was a most enlightened man and teacher and was filled with such compassion for human suffering and distress that it is understandable that the status of women should always have been high in Buddhist countries such as Burma, Cambodia and Ceylon. Not only have men and women in Buddhist society always enjoyed equal rights, but Buddhist and Jain women can also become nuns. They have never suffered from the problems of seclusion or relegation to special activities and professions that were imposed for special reasons upon Hindus and Muslims.

PARSIS

Parsis form a small minority community in India, but their social pattern is interesting as it stems from one of the

most ancient of law-givers, Zarathustra, who lived in Iran some time between 1,000 and 600 B.C. While almost nothing is known of the life of this great teacher, not only did his doctrines influence Greek thought, but his tenets of equality and humanity are as alive today in the small community known as Parsis (Zoroastrians) as when he first promulgated them. The striking factor in this faith is belief in the freedom of choice for a human being, his realization that life consists of the bad and the better, not good and evil, and that perfection leading to a "renewal of existence" can only come about by the tireless struggle of every human soul against evil.

To Zarathushtra, women had identical responsibilities in the fight against evil and parents worked together to teach love and understanding of God and reverence for truth to their children. In a Parsi wedding, the bride has the right to stop the ceremony should she not wish to marry the man chosen for her, and the nodding of her head is mandatory upon parents and priests alike. Similarly, between the 7th and 14th year of a child's life, whether boy or girl, the *navjot* or new birth ceremony is performed, in which a child is asked to choose his or her faith.

While the rights of women are always protected by virtue of their active participation in community life, in law the British system of inheritance by will has been adopted by Parsis during the last century. When a man dies intestate, his widow receives a one-third share along with her daughters while the sons inherit the rest. Clan solidarity is an integral part of Parsi community life and the sense of equality is so highly developed that virtually no one is poor. Non-sectarian social welfare projects have been heavily endowed by Parsi charities.

CHRISTIANS AND SIKHS

Two of the largest minority groups are Christians and Sikhs, who contribute two more patterns of life to the subcontinent. The Christian pattern tends to be western, particularly in urban areas, having been largely influenced by missionary

movements from Europe from the 15th century onwards, though Christianity came to India in the 1st century A.D. with St. Thomas, who formed the flourishing Syrian Church in South Malabar.

Sikhism, on the other hand, follows the Hindu pattern of life. As a result, Sikh women share the same legal disabilities as their Hindu sisters. Sikhism as a movement grew in the 16th century (particularly after the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh) partly as a militant offshoot of Hinduism in direct challenge to the Islamic influence of Moghul sovereignty. On the philosophical side, it reflects the monotheistic influence of Islam and represents also a reaction against Hindu caste ideas.

The reform aspect automatically brought women equal rights in the home and the temple (*gurdwara*) where they sit in congregation along with men and in some cases are even permitted to conduct ceremonials. They are also free to move about in public.

Unlike the elaborate ritual enjoined upon Hindus from birth to death, the young Sikh male from the age of 14 onwards only undergoes baptism to become a full-fledged *Khalsa.* In this ceremony, which is a sacrament, the martial aspect of Sikh thought and its historical context is abundantly clear.

The ceremony itself has all the elements of the martial. The boy stands in the temple in front of a cauldron of boiling *amrit* (sugar and water) and stirs it with dagger while swearing his vows.

The marriage ceremony likewise is a sacrament. Vows taken before the ceremony include the contents of the letter of the Fourth Guru to his daughter, in which the conduct of the wife is laid down. In this, she is enjoined to look upon her husband as her lord and to ask for forgiveness in any dispute even if she is not at fault. No more tactful and subtle means of keeping peace in the home could probably be devised.

The religious differences having now been briefly stated, it remains to examine the divisions that are imposed upon society

by economic factors and by traditional work and occupations.

RURAL SOCIAL PATTERN

Rural society can be roughly divided into two groups—the land-owners and the agriculturists.

Each group has its distinct family patterns and mode of living, type of home, social life and habits of food, dress and living standards. As the subject is vast, only the main differences of family patterns may be sketched.

In rural society, the home is always simple. It may consist of two or three rooms for the entire joint family with a shed attached for the plough and milch animals and generally a walled courtyard. All this is made of simple materials such as mud, bamboo and thatch. In the veranda or courtyard tools and implements are stored, men-folk sit in the evening over a smoke and women gossip, and inside the home are a kitchen with brass and clay pots, a shelf or two for condiments and oil and clay jars for grain. Frequently kitchens are resplendent with gleaming brass pots which are the pride of the women and are kept shining by vigorous scrubbing with ash and mud on the well-edge or river bank.

The other rooms are furnished with rolls of bedding piled in a corner, a small niche, perhaps, with a household divinity, and a shelf for oil lamps, a few stray bottles and jars, calendars or cheap coloured pictures of political leaders or gods and goddesses. There is no attempt at ornamentation beyond decoration of the outside walls, painted in ochre tints which are frequently very lively and striking, and sometimes carved wooden doorways. On the whole, the interiors are dark, sanitation is negligible, and life centres round the rising and setting of the sun. With the new village welfare schemes conditions are quickly changing. In some ways, however, it is hard to understand from where the exquisite designs of rural crafts and skills stem, for many outstanding arts and crafts have come from our rural background.

Village society, especially where communications are difficult, is generally self-sufficient. A barter system operates, according to which services, like the barber's are paid for by grain at harvest time, and men and women utilize time between crops for craft work. Village women lead a free life. They do household work, prepare simple food for the day, care for their children, which is seldom more than feeding, oiling and bathing them, and devote the rest of their working hours to carrying water, collecting fuel, washing clothes, and carrying out weeding, rice-planting and other subsidiary tasks on the land, though the sowing of seed has laways been considered the work of the man.

Work is hard and there is seldom any entertainment except festivals and visits to the nearest towns. The religious pilgrimage and the country fair bring together crowds of men and women from considerable distances in bullock-carts, enjoying themselves with much laughter, dancing and singing. These scenes are invariably a riot of colour, especially in Rajasthan, where women wear gorgeous full skirts of printed and embroidered cotton and elaborate head cloths of the famous tie-and-dye technique besides heavy silver anklets, rings and necklaces. Even the bullocks wear fancy cover in gay reds and oranges, made by the women by applique work on white cloth, and garlands round their horns.

THE LAND-OWNER

The land-owner's life is in the same general village background, but differs in every other respect. He normally lives in a comparatively large house and employs some servants, who may have served the family for generations. Customs in these families tend to an extreme conservatism and women play little part in life beyond raising children, supervising the household and doing handwork and embroidery. They also spend a great deal of time upon elaborate preparations for festivals and religious ceremonies. In these homes the girls spend hours learning singing, dancing and painting or embroidery work, and for festival days draw interesting floor decorations

of *alpona*, which are elaborate designs traced on the ground in rice powder and coloured grains. To quote John Irwin, "*alpona* are drawings required for the enactment of rituals performed by women at times of crisis. It was originally a custom of the village, the objective being the promotion of rain, success of the harvest or safety of the village against an epidemic. The usual underlying idea is that, when mimed in ritual, the objective is more likely to be realized." So designs are drawn on the ground with rice paste, which forms the centre of the action for the ritual, and women sing in chorus:

> We worship the painted *mandir* tree
> which promises us granaries full of rice and paddy. .
> We worship the rice paste drawing of the *mandir*
> Knowing that our home-land will be rich in gold and silver.

Household pride in these families is reflected in the metal utensils, from kitchenware to copper bath tubs, treasured heirlooms in many families, and in the careful maintenance of stores and accounts. The most characteristic picture of the house-wife would be with an enormous bunch of keys, endlessly vigilant over chillies and pickles drying in the sun, rice and lentils being cleaned and butter being clarified to make precious *ghee* (clarified butter) which is an essential cooking medium for Indian food.

In exceptional cases, where the wife is educated, she may take an active part in the life of the village and is not infrequently a good estate manager interested in community development, social reform and farm improvements.

PATTERN IN THE CITIES

Turning to towns and cities, social custom has the curious habit of intensifying itself, conservatism becoming much more rigid and liberalism much more free.

The average lower income group way of living in the crowded industrial cities of India today is deplorable and great efforts in housing and slum clearance are needed. Over-crowding is the main problem for industries have attracted vast numbers of rural families to the cities where they live in crowded single rooms. A typical room of this sort is small, dark and

unpainted. It is furnished with string cots, on which may be piled rolls of bedding, a string from wall to wall on which are hung clothes, and in a corner the wife squats on her haunches by a small charcoal stove, cooking in a round iron pan while children roll against tin trunks which hold all the family possessions. In this sordid setting, the women cares for her family and bears children. Privacy is unknown and even the youngest children share the burdens of adult life.

Food is naturally the greatest expense, and foodgrains account for nearly half the toal expenditure. It is a constant struggle to provide the family with clothing, medicines and education, but 7 per cent of the annual income is spent on festivals, though there is generally no budget whatsoever for entertainment. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that any public event, a civic function, political meeting, street argument or even a car accident will draw large and interested crowds.

MIDDLE INCOME GROUPS

The rising cost of living since the last war has fallen hardest upon the middle income groups, whose standard of living is higher and whose conservatism imposes a greater observance of religious custom. The joint family is one means of bridging economic difficulties, as till very recently it was not considered proper for wives to earn their own living. Their role in life tended to be restricted to their homes and the preparation of food, since at the most a part-time servant only could be afforded, and children and old people had to be cared for.

A family in such a group may live in two or three rooms sparsely furnished and overcrowded with children and in-laws, the interiors having little pretence of ornamentation or comfort. Not infrequently the mother-in-law will be found sitting cross-legged on a bed, from which point of vantage a ceaseless commentary upon life, neighbours, the vegetable vendors' knavery and the inadequacies of the daughter-in-law flows. Under this remorseless eye and caustic tongue, the young wife will be desperately trying to cope with her tasks of cooking the

meals, bathing the children, sewing, cleaning grain and spices and oiling the hair of an older girl or sister. Inevitably her sense of frustration emerges in shrill anger and punishment of the young, together with threats quite disproportionate to the offence. In such an atmosphere where the mother is herself an object of censure and reproof, there is little discipline of children, which is not undone both by the indulgence of a grandparent or by the natural war between a mother-in-law and the utterly untrained and inadequate female who has married her son. There are of course happy joint families and kindly mother-in-law to highlight the usual pattern.

Civic sense is almost never a part of child training, since consideration for others is not emphasized so much as consideration for the old. Untidiness and filth outside homes and tenements tend rather to be the rule than the exception, though personal cleanliness is rigidly observed and even the poorest bathe daily. The housewife also, while fastidious over the cleanliness of clothes, floors, food and utensils to such a degree that left-over food is never eaten but invariably thrown away, will hardly notice cobwebs on the ceiling, dust collected on an old calendar and grime obscuring the windows.

In all such circles, especially in large joint families where grandparents, parents, un-married brothers and sisters, children and perhaps daughters-in-law may live under one roof, there is little privacy and, in a sense, very little childhood, as it is known in western society. Children and adults lead no life apart and there is great emphasis upon respect for elders. Children are loved and cherished and to many Indians a child can do no wrong. Nevertheless, they tend to be rather ignored in essentials relating to character-building and individual needs while adults continue in their own world and preoccupations. The result of this is that almost no taboos or enquiries exist about sex and procreation. It is not only openly discussed and young brides teased, but birth is a normal phenomenon that takes place as a rule in the heart of the home. A young girl goes to marriage, therefore, with full knowledge and desire to fulfil her part in this drama of the continuity of life. In addition, from the age of six or seven it is likely that the

young girl has already had almost full care of a younger brother or sister.

In marriage arrangements, it is normally the women folk who do the negotiations, though the father and grandparents make the initial selection, for with restricted social life and meeting points marriages are generally arranged between families. How complicated the formula for these arrangements can be has to be seen to be believed. Frequently the village barber acts as the go-between, for families cannot afford to be rebuffed in the initial enquiries. When the mother of a girl receives indications that the boy's family are agreeable, intermediaries, such as aunts or friends, may arrange for the exchange of the young people's horoscopes, for the stars must be in agreement if the match is to be a success. The next stage is either the exchange of photographs or, more frequently today, the official meeting of the young couple. If they like each other, then the final details are arranged. These negotiations may take months of loving, patient, tactful work, and where the parents of both parties plan wisely for the future of their children the marriage are generally successful.

The girl is the centre of much feminine excitement. She feels important, being the central figure in the drama, with all the wedding preparations ahead and the thrill of selecting gorgeous *saris* and jewelry and receiving them from her future in-laws. In the past her father might be forced to stay the proceedings because the dowry demanded by the boy's family, based upon his earning powers or status in the community was too high. Today the question of dowry has been waived in many communities and the cost of a marriage, with its formula of feeding enormous wedding parties from both sides, has been considerably reduced.

Even now, however, weddings are a period of immense feminine activity. Relations come in droves for the event, and the womenfolk must do all the cooking for these huge gatherings as well as make arrangements for the ceremony and adornment of the bride. This pattern is fairly widespread in all conservative groups.

UPPER INCOME GROUPS

In the upper income groups, the type of home and the duties of women vary very greatly in the conservative or traditional home and in the modern home. In the former, there may be great wealth and frequent display in the size of the mansion and its furnishings, but there is little participation of the women of the house, who often keep to their own quarters on an upper floor, where life is little different in essence to that in the homes of their less wealthy conservative sisters. There is the same idea of seclusion, the same preoccupation with household activities in a feminine world (in this case supervisory, since the staff of servants may be considerable), the same emphasis upon training girls in singing, music and the domestic arts, in marriage arrangments, visits of relatives, pilgrimages and festivals of all kinds.

FESTIVALS

In these households, important festivals like *Diwali*, the happy time when the Goddess of Wealth is lured to homes by the display of oil lamps, and *Raksha Bandhan*, when brothers swear devotion to their sisters, who tie *rakhis* or small silk cords around their wrists, are celebrated. The *rakhi* binds brother and sister in a bond of eternal faithfulness, and it is a time of great family happiness and activity. During *Basant*, the festival of Spring, girls dress in yellow *saris* to echo the flowering mustard and put flowers in their hair.

At *Id*, the Muslim festival, women wake before dawn and stir great cauldrons of boiling milk and dried fruits and saffron to make *shir khorma* which, along with plates of *pulao* and mutton curry, they send to friends and relations. Then, before the open-air prayers, boys are given new clothes and bright caps and walk self-consciously to the prayer ground with their fathers, where thousands of people join them in prayer.

At *Diwali*, while their mothers are busy making sweets, the young girls trace *alpona* designs at the house entrance and

string mango leaves across the doors. Children help to place tiny clay lamps along verandah and roof edges, steps and windows. Bits of cotton *saris* are rolled to make wicks, and there is giggling and bustle as oil is poured into the little lamps, which are lit at dusk. A drab city is transformed and the pure happiness of children shines like the sparklers they wave about or the crackers they explode the whole night through.

In the last 30 years, thanks to the powerful leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the identification of women with the national movement for independence, great numbers of women from conservative homes joined in the political struggle and became social and political workers on a scale that is not properly appreciated in India even today. An interesting factor of this great change that came into the heart of conservative homes is that these women did not neglect any aspect of their traditional role within the home, with all its complications of joint family management, grandmother and mother-in-law tyranny and a certain amount of silent rebellion on the part of husbands, who felt that they might be neglected in this new scheme of things.

THE MODERN HOME

As opposed to the conservative home, the modern homes of the middle and upper income groups are the product of contact with the West during the last hundred years. While westernism as such is rather looked down upon still by conservative society, the comforts of the modern home are certainly persuasive and the method of education and changing economic patterns has had a very definite effect upon society.

Most large cities, for instance, are built on modern lines with a mixture of the bungalow-style architecture of the last century and the modern flats and houses of the present. The furnishing of these houses varies considerably. The more conservative groups who have adopted modern ways tend to use rather untasteful furniture, stiffly arranged, with photographs of family members or landscapes on the walls. Others,

however, accomplish the most exquisite interiors with the use of the vast range of Indian handicrafts and *objets d'art*, from the bronzes of South India to stone carvings from ancient temples and paintings of modern artists. The house is a family centre and there are frequent parties. Friends drop in for coffee in the morning or drinks in the evening.

The modern woman is generally well educated and has the same tastes as her husband, whether in sport, intellectual life or politics. Or again her interests may be the very opposite and she may take up a career of her own, in which she generally has the whole-hearted support of her family members. Where her interests clash with those of her husband, there is a very strong tendency to subordinate her life to his. Such women use their energies in voluntary activities of social or cultural work or in just maintaining beautiful homes, playing bridge and being good hostesses.

A great change has come about in modern society in the relations between parents and children. In many cases conservatism is driving young people to rebellion, and the excesses visible in student indiscipline are symptoms of a basic insecurity. The fault lies largely in families that try to perpetuate the old concept of blind obedience to elders, and where parents do nothing to meet the emotional needs and troubles of adolescence. Where a better balance exists, greater companionship is growing between the generations, and the family pattern is comparable in interests and activities to any well balanced home anywhere else.

VALUES OF MODERN INDIAN WOMEN

The impact of modern life on women may be diverse but the main emphasis is still upon the home and the rearing of children, and the mother, in spite of having several servants, will always know how to cook. She spends a good part of her time supervising the daily stores, checking the laundry, garden, poultry and cowshed, the children's clothes and home-work or extra music or dancing lessons as well as all aspects of

budget and expenditure, as good housewives have been trained to do from time immemorial.

Where cattle are kept in homes with large gardens or in country areas, the collecting of cream and making of butter is directly supervised by the housewife, as milk and butter are extremely important items of diet in all Indian households. The housewife too generally buys her monthly grain and household stores. She is very careful about its daily distribution for the home and staff and the cleaning and sorting of grain and spices and the making of seasonal pickles.

Training in household management has always been strictly enforced by mothers upon daughters, and in recent times home economics has also begun to play an increasing part in education. A girl thus has a more scientific background for home and child management. One of the largest of these institutions in India is the Lady Irwin College founded by a Board of eminent women in 1932 under the direction of Smt. Hannah Sen. The college functioned independently for years and was then affiliated to the University of Delhi.

BREAK-UP OF OLD WAYS

In recent times, economic changes have been the greatest factor in breaking up the traditional way of life. Caste was understandably the first to be affected and in urban society now has hardly any influence on the people's life beyond the choice of a partner for marriage within the same caste group. The joint family has likewise been broken up by the migration of younger members to industrial areas, sons no longer learning or following their father's crafts or professions, as they did previously, and the greater independence of women in their role today as additional wage-earners. This last development has been due to the rise in the cost of living as well as rising living standards.

While the joint family system has been breaking down in the last 30 or 40 years, a modified joint family system has again arisen in many cities, since a single income does not always

suffice to maintain a family. One sample survey, however, shows that where 78% of women were against the joint family system, 42% of men were in favour of it. It is significant that the annual per capita income in India is today only Rs. 253, an indication of the very low standard of living that persists for the vast majority of the people of the subcontinent.

While its appearance may have changed considerably, the family unit continues to be a very stable one and its values have for the most part remained unaffected. There is much in the conservative way of life which operates against the dignity and status of women, but there is also a great deal in its values that most modern Indian women sincerely hope will never be lost.

DEVOTION, THE KEY

The broken homes of many countries are the seeds of insecurity and thus disruption, rebellion and hatred in the child. Security is the basic need of human beings, and an orderly home in which they can face the storms of life and the challenge of existence. The family, therefore, is undoubtedly more important than the individual, and if women have been docile in accepting this, the sacrifice of their own personal happiness and creativeness has surely not been in vain.

Perhaps one of the greatest single factors causing India's peculiar tranquillity, her calm in the face of trials and adversity, that has been likened to a 'lamp in a windless place', is the spirit of devotion that animates her women and the spirit of renunciation that inspires it. This is neither fiction nor fancy. The fact that the family is invariably placed above self and duty placed before personal happiness is a very powerful reason for the stability of the Indian social order. In this connection one might end with an ancient tale. A king calls his beloved by a new name for every one of her many attributes. Finally she replies: "My lord, you have named me with many

fair names but have forgotten the most important, which is devotion ! For a woman may have every virtue, but without devotion those virtues are as nectar poisoned".

It is not for nothing that women in India throughout these hundreds of years have accepted the inevitability of their role of devotion and sacrifice. There is something primal in the recognition that as creators of life they are automatically its sustainers. The mother goddess of pre-Aryan times knew her power and, strangely enough, in the Indian concept the woman is not "the weaker sex" but the embodiment of *shakti*– the female principle of life, known in modern terms as energy and synonymous with power.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

Piloo Nanavutty

India is the home of religion: not of one but of many faiths. Their range and variety are remarkable. At one extreme are found the animistic and totemistic beliefs that prevail among the twenty million tribal people of the country. At the other end are the subtle and comprehensive religious systems of Hindu and Islamic thought. Between the two extremes lie the religions of the minority groups: the Christians, numbering eight million; the Sikhs, six million; the Buddhists, five hundred thousand; the Jains, one and a half million; the Parsis or Zoroastrians, about one hundred and ten thousand; and the Jews, roughly twenty-six thousand. The two largest religious groups are the Hindus, comprising 304 million, and the Muslims about 36 million.

Besides the broad divisions given above, the Census Reports of 1941 and 1951 list 250 linguistic groups and almost as many shades of religious belief. Yet to look upon India as a vast conglomeration of races and creeds unconnected with one another would be misleading. The bond that links the religious-minded throughout the length and breadth of the land is *bhakti*. "The aim of life is to attain *bhakti*", said Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), the saint-prophet of Bengal. *Bhakti* is intense devotion to God, springing from a deep love of Him. It finds its spontaneous expression in the *bhajan*, or religious love lyric. *Bhajans* are composed to this day by illiterate peasants in the remotest of Indian villages and by learned pundits in their cloistered hermitages. These love songs to God reveal the yearning of the human soul to possess Him here and now, "to hold God in your very eyes", as Zarathustra (Zoroaster) says in the *Gathas*. This ecstatic love of God flowers in the other religious sects as well.

Hence, by religion in India is meant no formal dogma embodied in an institution but the realization and appropriation of God in the personal life of every single individual upon earth. This goal is to be achieved through *sadhana* or self-discipline, which forms an essential part of *yoga*, universal spiritual discipline. The *guru*, or spiritual guide, must be found, and he will show his pupil the path of *mukti or moksha*, spiritual liberation. This, in brief, is the Hindu view of life. The Hindus divide a man's life into three stages. First comes the *brahmacharya* stage, from the ages of seven to twenty-one years when, in the past, a boy was handed over to a *rishi* or sage who dwelt in the forest and taught his pupils the *Vedas* as well as the cultural arts of music, song and dance. The second stage is that of the *sansari*, when a man marries, rears a family and follows a trade or profession. The last stage is that of *sanyasa*, when a man renounces the world and all worldly duties, at the age of fifty-five years or so, and retires into seclusion to meditate and commune with God and attain *moksha* (salvation).

WOMAN AS SHAKTI

This ancient Hindu pattern of living admitted women to the same privileges as men for woman was held to be the embodiment of God's *shakti*—His creative force working in and through man and the universe. As such, she was the friend and equal of man. This was certainly true in Vedic times when women not only composed religious hymns but also partook in the ritual sacrifices and in all recondite discussions.

The relegation of woman to a subordinate role came much later with the formulation of the *Laws of Manu*. The reason for this reversal is to be sought in the economic and sociological changes in the structure of Hindu society and not in any religious sanction. Religious sanctions, however, were imposed at the time, and the Hindu woman's sense of devotion and sacrifice exploited to her own great disadvantage.

Today, Hindu society reveals many different levels of development. In the villages, the woman is the economic partner of man and shares with him the arduous life he leads, often working harder and longer hours than he does. She is also invariably the custodian of religion. It is she who plants the sacred *tulsi* (basil) in the *angan*, or courtyard of the mud hut. It is she who plucks the *tulsi* leaf for the morning *puja* (worship) when the family gather round the image of the deity or household god or goddess sacred to that particular family. Token offerings of milk and curds, *ghee*, rice and lentils, fruit and flowers in season are made, and the day's work begun after prayer and meditation. At harvest time, after the first crop has been cut, it is the woman who brings a handful of the newly reaped grain before the image to be blessed.

In the urban areas, the Hindu woman is a little more prosperous than her sisters in the villages, yet the religious fervour and devotion in her heart are the same. In the morning she, too, does *puja*. The only difference is that the offerings are placed on a silver or copper salver, the wick lights may have silver or copper stands instead of the humbler earthen-ware used in the village home, and the tinkling bells, to be rung at certain stages of the ritual, may be made of silver. However sophistciated and westernized the Hindu woman be, it should not be forgotten that she is more often than not very well versed in her own scriptures, has a trained voice, with which she sings *bhajans* and often partakes in *kirtans*, religious gatherings where God is worshipped in song and dance. This gives her an inward peace and stability which she shares with other Indian women, whatever their religion.

LIVING ENTITIES

A word of explanation may be given here as to the function of the idol worshipped in the Hindu home, rich or poor. The vast pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses are by no means dead. They are living entities enshrined in the hearts and minds of their devotees. Every god or goddess embodies some

aspect of the Supreme Divinity, *viz* ., Brahman. Take, for instance, that most endearing and homely of godlings, Ganesha or Ganpathi, the pot-bellied, elephant-nosed god of wisdom and jollity. His image in the home brings his physical presence close to every inmate. He is never relegated to a Sunday thought, but every day and also at times of stress and strain or crisis the image is brought out, whatever the hour of the day or night, and all the household gather round to pray and ask for divine guidance. God's kindliness, His wisdom, His patience and His humour are all embodied in Ganesha. Children particularly adore him, for one may stroke his nose, nudge him and return wink for wink. At festivals when his image is taken in procession to be dipped in the sea or the river, children come prancing and clapping their hands at the tail end of the procession, singing loudly the nursery rhyme:

> Ganapati Baba moria
> Thanda pani ma boria,
> Char chana choria.

In translation it would read something like this :

> Ganpati Bava in cold water is dipped,
> Four grains of gram in passing he nipped.

The little rhyme embodies the jollity and the *joie de vivre* of living which Ganesha embodies.

Every Hindu home, therefore, has either a separate prayer room or just a niche for the precious idol who symbolizes God. It is thus that His living presence is felt by all members of the family who, in the words of a Krishna Bhajan, say to Him :

> You are the Treasure in my body;
> You are the Dweller in my house;
> You are to me, O Lord,
> What wings are to a flying bird,
> What water is to a fish.

Again, it has often been said that the Hindu idols in temples are grotesque, crude and frightening, that there is nothing gracious, winsome and beautiful in them as in Christian art. Such an attitude completely misunderstands Hindu iconography, for the images in the temples whether terrible or benign, are there for the worshipper to concentrate on the

meaning of all the symbols carved in them. The Brahmanic Trinity is massive and serene with its three heads and three eyes in profile. On the other hand, the Goddess Kali, in her destructive aspect, inspires terror with her red tongue hanging out and her sword held high in one hand. But here she embodies God's Wrath against Evil, which is depicted as a monster whom she crushes with her foot. In her benign aspect, as Durga, she is the Goddess of Mercy and Love, of Child-birth and Gracious Living. As such, her images are like those of a beautiful Hindu bride.

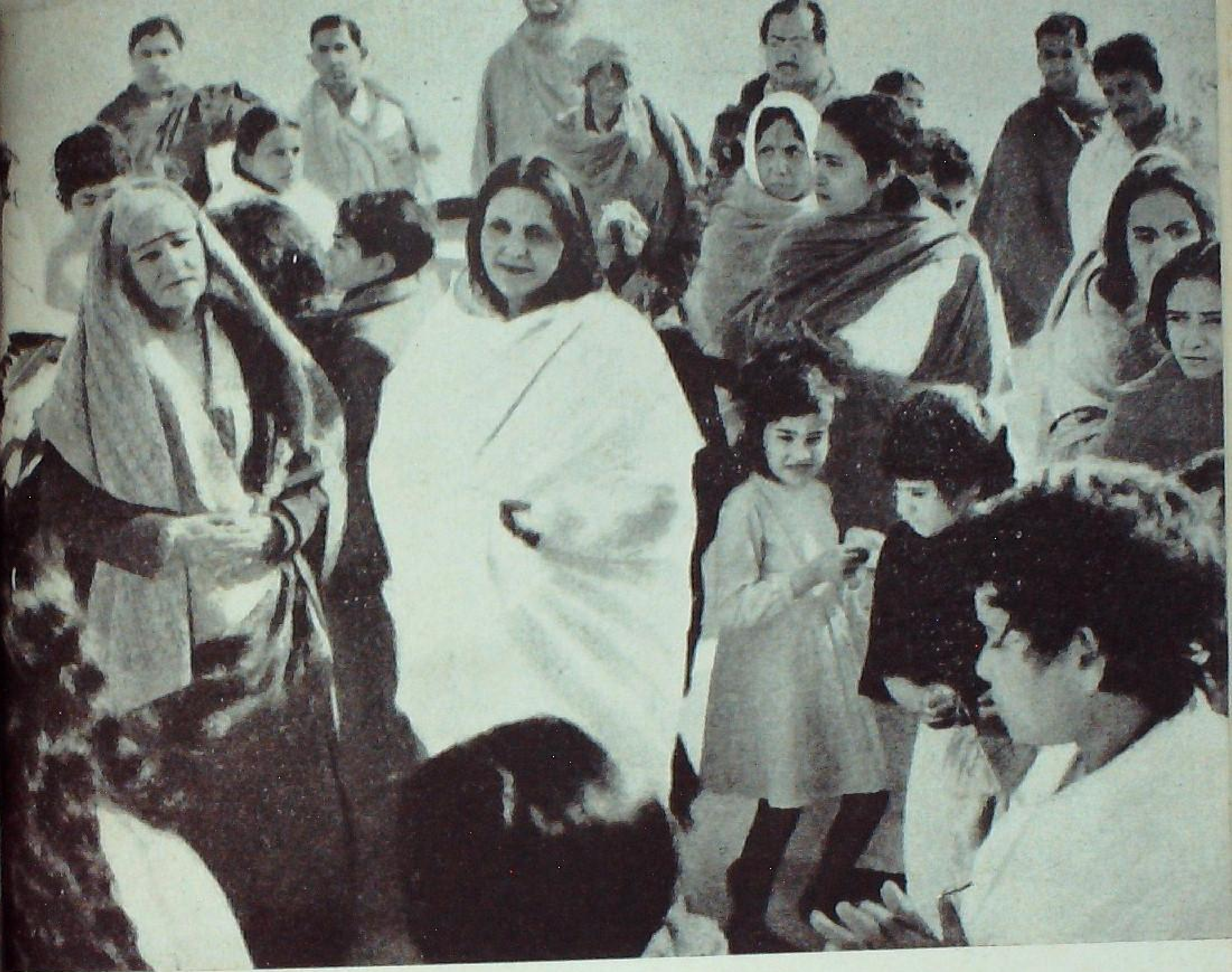
It could be objected that only the educated Hindu is able to follow the meaning of the symbols carved on the various idols, but this is not true. The illiterate peasant has a profound grasp of the fundamentals of his faith.

An incident in my childhood may be quoted as an illustration. As a little girl of four I was brought up by my parents as a devout follower of the doctrines of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), the prophet of ancient Iran. I was taught that Ahura Mazda is Lord of Life and Wisdom, that His Body is the Light and His Spirit, Truth, and that He is to be grasped "in purest essence and in vision". Though this was beyond my comprehension at that age, I was made to understand that He should never be worshipped in any image whatsoever. Fire and the Sun are His symbols, for just as fire destroys all filth but itself retains its purity, and just as the Sun shines on the good and the evil and its light and warmth are evident even to a blind man's eye, just so is Ahura Mazda Himself. Hence, during the day we turn our faces to the Sun when we pray, and to the fire or lamplight at night.

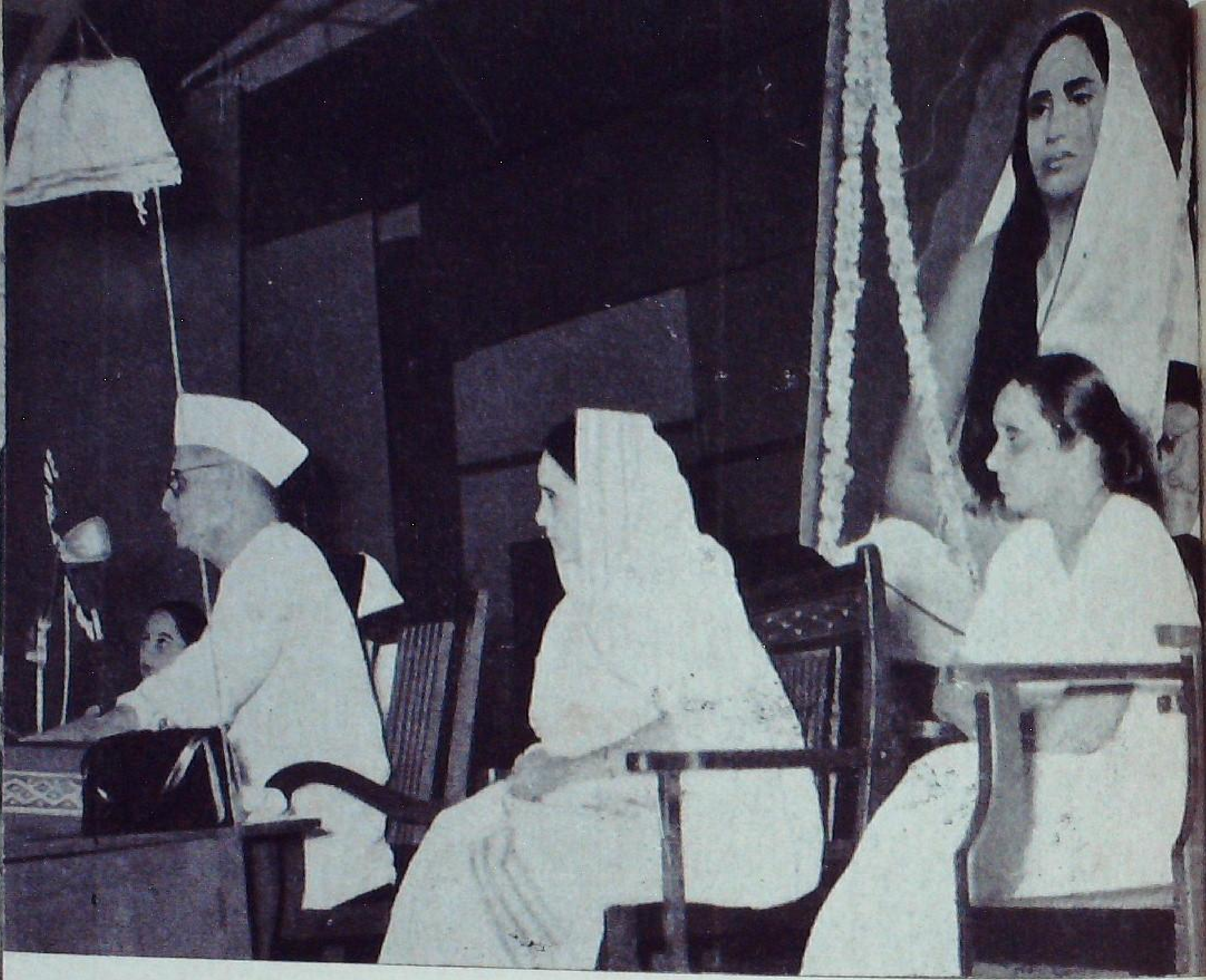
Like all children of that age I was imaginative and decided to go and meet the Sun in the sky and say my prayers to him face to face. My father was then a District Magistrate and we often camped in tents, in the open fields, in little villages of Uttar Pradesh when he was on inspection. On one such occasion I woke around dawn and clutching my beaded prayer cap under my arm, slipped away on noiseless, bare feet past the dozing *chowkidar* (night-watchman) out into the open fields. But alas, the longer I walked the further away

A Muslim lady visiting a saint—a Rajasthani painting from Bundi, 18th century

Hindu women devotees being told the meaning of ritual at a religious festival



Ma Anandamayee of Banaras with her devotees
(From Richard Lannoy's *India*, published by Thames and Hudson, London)



Birth centenary of Holy Mother Sardamani Devi celebrated at a meeting of the Gujerat, Maharashtra and Kutch Women's Cultural Sammelan

the Sun seemed to go. Soon I was lost, and began to cry. Still crying helplessly, I came suddenly to a clearing and stopped dead in astonishment. A villager was prostrating himself full length on the ground before two smooth, rounded stones marked with the sacred vermilion powder. I was shocked at this idolatry, and when he had done praying, I pointed to the stones and asked: "Do you think tho e stones are God" (*Tun voh patthar ko Khuda Samajte ho*)? The peasant looked at me with quizzical, shrewd eyes, scratched his bald head and smiled. I repeated my question. Then he answered with slow emphasis: "No, my child, I do not think those stones are God, but the Spirit of God enters into those stones when I pray" (*Nahi beti, mai yeh patthar ko Bhagwan nahi samajta. Magar, jab mai prarthana karta hun tab paramatma ki atmic shakti yeh patthar meh paivast hoti hai*). Literally translated, it means God's *atmic shakti*, or soul force, penetrates these stones to saturation point when I pray.

The terms used by the peasant, *paramatma* and *atmic shakti*, are technical terms used in the Hindu scriptures, in the *Vedas*, *Purans* and *Upanishads*, in the Vedantic and Vaishnavite texts and in the four great systems of *Yoga*. Where did this illiterate peasant learn such terms?. And who taught him to use them with such accuracy ?

The answer is to be found in the *katha* reciter, or wandering preacher, who goes from village to village, from town to town, and preaches to the common people or to the rich if they care to invite him to their homes. *Katha* is a story with a moral to it. Wherever he goes, the *katha* reciter receives hospitality. In a village he is usually the guest of the village headman. At dusk, the whole village will gather on the *chabutra*, or cemented platform, built round the trunk of a large peepul, neem or banyan tree. The *katha* reciter will sit, cross-legged, in the centre, with his back leaning against the tree trunk. His audience, consisting of men, women and children, old and young, will gather round him. First there will be *puja*. The image of the god or goddess protecting that particular village will be brought out. Flowers and other offerings will be made, sacred texts will then be recited and after that a *katha* will be

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chosen for discussion and comment. It may be chosen from the great epics of the *Ramayana or Mahabharata*, or from that storehouse of Krishna legends, the *Srimad Bhagvata Purana*, or from any one of the *Shastras*. In this way, the masses learn about the gods and goddesses of Hindu cosmogony, the philosophy of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*, the death and the life hereafter, the body, soul and spirit, the *Dharma*, the Law which is at the foundation of existence, and the *Karma* or action which leads to the cycle of birth and rebirth till a man attains *moksha* or liberation.

What is more, women in the villages may also play the role of *katha* reciter. One of the accompanying illustrations shows a village woman with a group of other women around her. She is explaining the symbolism of the ritual vessels lying near her. She will next proceed to recite a *katha* and propound its meaning.

Although it has been shown that something of the philosophic thought of Hinduism filters down to the masses, it is still true to say that a great deal of superstition exists side by side. Take, for instance, the case of Sitla Devi, Goddess of Smallpox. Some 35 years ago there was a severe epidemic of this disease. Thousands died in the villages. Images of Sitla Devi were worshipped in public, and young mothers, in their ignorance, deliberately exposed their off-spring to those who were dying of smallpox in the hope that if the children escaped death they would, for the rest of their lives, be specially favoured by the goddess. Today, however, with the spread of health education, community development projects and a vast network of trained social workers all over the country, such senseless suffering is avoided.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The inspiration behind the daily worship of the Hindu woman in town or village lies in devotion which, in turn, is fostered and nourished by a close familiarity with the lives and writings of the saint-poets of India. Their history is part

of the history of the Bhakti Movement. In Hinduism there are two paradoxical conceptions of the one, single Godhead. According to the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta*, God is Brahman, the ineffable unknowable Being who comprehends all things, and is the cause of all. This same Brahman is also Ishwar, the personal God who dwells in the heart of every man, speaks, guides, loves, cherishes and redeems every living soul. As such, He incarnates in Vishnu, Krishan and Rama. It is this aspect of the Godhead which is enshrined in Vaishnavism and the Bhakti Movement.

Ramanuja (1017-1137) is considered to be the founder of the Bhakti Movement. This remarkable saint so deeply won the hearts of those around him and so throughly initiated them in the ecstatic love of God that an unbroken stream of *bhaktas* or devotees have come down in this tradition to the present day. Four centuries later, Krishna Chaitanya (1485-1535) swept the countryside of Bengal and Orissa with his magnetic personality and his beautiful *bhajans*, and founded the Vaishnavite Movement in those two States. In the North, Ramanand (14th-15th century) founded a famous school of devotees at Banaras. Among his twelve disciples, whom he named *Avadhuta* (the Liberated), were Kabir (1440-1518), the Muslim weaver beloved by Hindu and Muslim alike; Sena, a barber; Nabha, a sweeper and author of a beautiful collection of lyrics, the *Bhaktamala* (Garland of Devotions), and two women disciples, Padmavati and Sursari, of whom very little is known.

Besides Ramanand, others who are much loved to this day are Guru Nanak (1469-1538), the founder of the Sikh faith; Mira (1504-1550), the Rajasthan princess who renounced all to become a devotee of the Lord Krishna, and Tulsidas (1532-1623). In Central India, the names of Tukaram, Namdev and Trilochan are well known. In the South two women poets are famous for their beautiful religious compositions. Kodhai, or Andal as she was later known, lived in the 9th century A.D. and wrote the *Tiruppavai*, a collection of Tamil lyrics dedicated to Lord Krishna. In the 11th century, Avvai wrote Tamil odes depicting the life she saw around her.

Her poems are to be found in the Sangam collections. In Maharashtra, in the West, Janabai is well known for her composition of *Abangas* which are chanted in *kirtans* to this day. Janabai lived in the 14th century. Two religious women poets of Kashmir may also be mentioned. They were Lalla Arifa (b. 1335) and Habba Khatun. The Emperor Jehangir writes of the women mystics of Kashmir that they lived "apart from joy and sorrow, and took nothing from anybody but broken bread".

In modern times the Bhakti Movement has been kept alive by the life and work of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) of Bengal and by his famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902); by Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) at Pondicherry; by Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) of Arunachala in the South; and, lastly, by the woman mystic, Ma Anandamayee (b. 1896) of Banaras.

MIRA

The best known and most popular of the saint-poets mentioned above is still Mira, the Rajasthan princess who sang and danced her way into the heart of God. She was the daughter of Ratan Singh Rathor of Merta. At the age of four, she announced she was the bride of Lord Krishna. Her parents gave her a little idol of Krishna which she cherished and loved, carrying it about with her till death. At twelve, she was betrothed to prince Bhojraj, son of Rana Sanga, but at the wedding ceremony, instead of walking thrice round her future husband, she walked thrice round the image of Lord Krishna. Her parent gave her the idol as part of her dowry. The young princess refused to permit her husband to consummate the marriage, and locked herself in her room with the image of Krishna to keep her company. Her parents-in-law and sister-in-law were cruel to her, yet the young girl was not to be daunted. She assorted, with *fakirs* and beggars, and it is said that the Emperor Akbar, with Tansen, his famous

musician, visited her in disguise and presented her with a beautiful necklace which a jeweller traced back to Akbar. At length, when persecution at home became unbearable, she fled to Gujerat and later to Dwarka in Kathiawar. She also visited Brindaban, the birth place of Lord Krishna. Her *bhajans*, composed in Brij Bahasa and also in Hindi as well as Gujerati, are sung all over India. They are always spontaneous, tender, teasing and full of a loving abandonment. Here is a verse from one of them:

> Lord, I would be the flute upon Thy lips,
> That Thou blow upon me and make me Thine;
> Lord, I would be the speck of dust under Thy feet
> That Thou carry me with Thee always.

Just before her death she wrote:

> All places of pilgrimage ever abide in the Gumti for me.
> I have abandoned my country, my queenly robes,
> my husband's palace, my property and my kingdom.
> Mira, Thy slave, cometh to Thee for refuge; her
> honour is now totally in Thy keeping.

Rana Sanga, her father-in-law, sent for her and would have had her forcibly abducted, but Mira, who was praying before the image of the god Ranchod, flung her arms round the idol and was absorbed in him. Only her *sari* was found twined round the image In Udaipur, formerly the capital of the Ranas of Mewar, her image, together with that of Ranchod, are worshipped side by side.

The *bhajan* is the focal point round which all Indians, whatever their faith, meet in friendship and adoration of the Divine. At a *kirtan*, or session of devotional songs, the singer is not important, nor his voice, however, rich and melodious, nor the accompaniment of flute, drum, harmonium or castanets, nor the listeners, whether few or many. What is important is the religious fervour with which the *bhajan* is sung. Every word of the song must stir the hearer to his very depths, for it is on the wings of the *bhajan* that the yearning soul reaches out Godward for a glimpse of Him.

> Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow with the vision of Thy face,
> And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind;
> Beholding Thee, the seven worlds forget their never-ending woe.
> What shall I say, then, of myself, a poor and lowly soul?

It is this *darshan*, or vision of God, that is the aim of every singer of *bhajans*; for *darshan* means coming face to face with the Beloved and receiving a divine benediction of peace and love and tranquillity. To have *darshan* of God is indeed to be blest, for no man can receive *darshan* till his heart and soul, his whole being, is first purified and then surrendered to that "Sovereign Desirable and Highest Willable Thing who is none other than God". Such love and surrender are perfectly revealed in the following *bhajan*:

> Thou art my All in All, O Lord; The Life of my life, my inmost being;
> I have none else in the three worlds but Thee to call my own.
> Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope; Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;
> Thou my wisdom and my strength.
> Thou art my home, my place of rest; my dearest friend, my next of kin;
> My present and my future Thou; my heaven and my salvation.
> Thou art my scriptures, my commandments; Thou art my ever gracious Guru;
> Thou the Spring of my boundless bliss.
> Thou art the Way, and Thou the Goal: Thou the Adorable One, O Lord!
> Thou art the Mother tender-hearted; Thou the chastising Father;
> Thou the Creator and Protector; Thou the Helmsman who dost steer
> My craft across the sea of life.

Not only is *darshan* essential for the soul to commune with God, but His *shakti*, His Divine Energy, must be embodied in concrete form at every *ashram* or spiritual retreat where men and women gather to meditate and study the things of the Spirit. When Sri Ramakrishna was alive, it was his young wife, known as the Mother, who embodied God's *shakti* in her person. The parents of Sri Ramakrishna hoped that marriage would draw their son away from the ascetic and mystical life. But, though he submitted to the marriage ceremony, Ramakrishna took his young wife to the Temple of Kali and placed her beside the image of the Divine Mother. Immediately, he went into *samadhi* (a deep trance) and the young bride too fell into *samadhi*. When both returned to normal consciousness the wife went into seclusion for four years, devoting that time

to yogic discipline till her whole nature was completely spiritualized. After that she returned to her husband, not to live as his wife but as the Mother, embodying God's *shakti*, His Divine Power of Love and Joy. This she diffused to all those who came in contact with her. To this day she has her own disciples, and her memory is honoured equally with that of her husband. At every *sammelan* (conference) of the Ramakrishna Mission her photograph is garlanded and homage paid to her by the assembled delegates.

Today, the perfect embodiment of *shakti* is to be found in the living person of Sri Anandamayee, a name which means Mother of Bliss. And indeed it is an apt name, for she radiates love and joy wherever she goes. Her sixtieth birthday was celebrated by her disciples at her *ashram* at Banaras in May, 1956. Devotees from all parts of India flock to her, and a few from other parts of the world as well. Like Mira, Anandamayee felt herself dedicated to the Divine Life from an early age. When she was three years old she would go into deep *samadhi*, from which she returned to normal consciousness after long intervals. Her parents wondered if she was an epileptic, and took her to several eminent doctors, till a well known doctor from South India diagnosed these trances for what they were and predicted, years ago, that the young girl would develop into a remarkable saint.

SUFISM

The equivalent of the Bhakti Movement among the Muslims is Sufism. The Sufis are the "Pure of Heart" and may be drawn from either of the two main Muslim sects, Shias and Sunnis, though it is the Sunnis who are more attracted towards Sufism. The Sufis interpret the Quran in a mystical sense, and like the Hindu *yogis* they too have their own path of spiritual discipline. Just as the Hindus insist on a *guru* or teacher, to guide the *chela* or pupil, so the Sufis also insist that the *pir* guide the *murshid*. Sufism came to India with the Moghuls, and found a ready response among the Hindu

masses, many of whom were newly made converts to Islam. The Indian Sufis drew their inspiration from the Persian Sufis, such as Baba Tahir, who lived in the 5th century A.D.; Rabia, the woman mystic of the 9th century, and, most important of all, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi (1207-1273), who developed and gave depth to Sufi doctrine as we know it today. Like the Hindu *bhajan*, the Muslim *ghazal*, or love lyric, is the chief medium of expression for the ecstatic love of God embodied in Sufism. Almost all the vocal folk music of India is to be found in the *bhajan* and the *ghazal*, the most widely employed literary forms in the country. The *ghazals* of Zaffar Bahadur Shah, Hazrat Mohani, Mohammed Iqbal, Mehr-ul-Qadri and other are well known, but I quote here the last two verses of a *ghazal* sung by a blind beggar of Baroda as he walked the streets of the city by day and by night:

> Go into the Rose Garden
> And ask the nightingale what is her state.
> It is Thou who art seated, O Beloved,
> In every flower, in every bud.
> Grant me heaven, or grant me hell,
> No sorrow have I, O Beloved.
> My will in Thine is one,
> My happiness bound with Thine.

The Sufis in India are modest and retiring and hard to cultivate. Many claim initiation into the mystical life in dreams and visions granted them by their *pir*, the saint under whose guidance they have submitted their lives. Several times a year an *urs*, or large religious gathering, is held at the grave of a *pir*, when *ghazals* are sung, meditation practised and spiritual instruction given to those who seek it. Two famous *pirs* in India were Mohinuddin Chisti, whose tomb is at Ajmer, and Nizamuddin Aulia, whose tomb is at Nizamuddin in Delhi.

Muslim women have also played their part in the development of Sufism, chiefly by studying its doctrines and contributing towards its literature. In Moghul times it was the custom for cultured Muslim ladies of high social standing to visit a *pir* in his hermitage. There is an illustration showing several Muslim ladies, with their maid-servants, visiting

a semi-naked ascetic who smokes his *hookah* as he quietly watches his visitors come from their palanquin. Besides the saint is a young man, his disciple, who is grinding corn for the day's meal.

The Bhakti Movement and Sufism flourished side by side, especially among the masses. When the Muslim weaver, Kabir, died (1518), both Hindus and Muslims fought for his body till Kabir himself appeared to them in a vision and asked them to lift the shroud. When this was done, a heap of flowers was found, half of which was taken by the Hindus and the other half by the Muslims. "A fitting conclusion", writes Evelyn Underhill, "to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of two great creeds."

SIKHISM

In Guru Nanak (1469-1538), the founder of the Sikh faith, the two influences blend in perfect harmony. Nanak was born at Talwandi, Lahore District, in the Punjab and was a Khatri by caste. His father, Kalu, was an accountant as well as a cultivator. Nanak was precocious and headstrong from childhood. He studied Hindi as well as Persian, which was the Court language of the Moghuls, and read avidly in both languages. He came under the spell of Kabir and Shaikh Ibrahim Farid (1450-1535). Nanak married and had two sons, earning his living as a storekeeper appointed by Daulat Khan, Governor of Sultanpur. But the urge to preach and teach grew stronger day by day, till he left work and wandered from place to place, accompanied by his faithful Muslim minstrel, Mardana, who accompanied his *bhajans* on the *rebeck*. His missionary labours led him as far afield as Ceylon. At the close of his life he stopped being a *sadhu* and settled down with his family at Kharatpur. Mardana also came to live with him but died soon after of the trials and exhaustion of the previous years.

Guru Nanak's teachings are collected in the *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs. He broke away both from the Hindus and Muslims. He did not believe in reincarnation nor in a plurality of gods. Nor did he accept the belief of the Muslims that

Mohammed was the last of the Prophets. Nanak laid emphasis on abstract Truth and the following of the righteous path in righteous action. The Introduction to the *Jupji*, or Morning Prayer, of the Sikhs, sums up Guru Nanak's teaching on God :

> There is one God.
> He is the supreme Truth.
> He, the Creator,
> Is without fear and without hate.
> He, the Omnipresent,
> Pervades the universe.
> He is not born,
> Nor does He die to be born again.
> By His grace shalt thou worship Him.
> Before Time itself
> There was Truth.
> When Time began to run its course
> He was the Truth.
> Even now, He is the Truth
> And
> Evermore shall Truth prevail.

Guru Nanak's *bhajans* are full of beauty and lyricism. Once, when he was at *puja* in a temple and saw the salver with lights being waved before the face of the image by the priest, he composed the following:

> The firmament is Thy salver,
> Th Sun and Moon Thy lamps,
> The galaxy of stars
> Are as pearls scattered
> The woods of sandal are Thine incense,
> The forests Thy flowers.
> But what worship is this—
> O Destroyer of Fear ?

Before his death, Guru Nanak chose his successor from among his disciples in preference to his own sons. This was Guru Angad (1504-1552). He consolidated the band of disciples, built *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples), and added to the lyrics already in the *Adi Granth*. There were eight more *Gurus* after him, but only the fifth *Guru*, Arjan (1563-1606). and the tenth *Guru*, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), need be mentioned as they nurtured and disciplined the new Sikh community into a courageous and deeply religious brotherhood.

The Sikhs excel as soldiers and as farmers. Today they are found in all walks of life, particularly in the Armed Forces. Their sturdy independence and moral courage make them a much respected and much loved community among the Indian people. It may interest readers to know that the word "Sikh" is a corruption of the Sanskrit "*shishya*" meaning pupil or disciple. As the first disciples of Guru Nanak were so named, the whole community later came to adopt the name.

TEACHINGS OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Guru Nanak's emphasis on a life of action full of good deeds is very close to the attitude of the Parsis, who follow the teachings of Zarathushtra, the Prophet of Ancient Iran. When the Arabs conquered Iran and the last Persian King, Yazezdard II, was routed at the Battle of Persepolis about 650 A.D., a few refugees set sail, in open sailing vessels, and came to India. Many women and children perished on the way, but a small contingent landed at the fishing village of Salsette. Bombay did not exist, the port of trade at the time being Surat on the River Tapti. The Hindu Ranas of Salsette were very good to the Persian refugees, most of whom came from Fars or Pars, a small town in South Persia. Hence the name Parsi, the man from Pars, which the entire community later adopted. Not only did the Hindu Ranas of Salsette give the refugees land on which to settle, complete freedom of worship and freedom to develop and educate their off-spring as they wished, but they never imposed the caste system upon them. The Parsis refrained from eating beef in deference to their Hindu rulers, adopted Gujerati as their mother tongue instead of Persian and their women adopted the *sari* as their national dress, wearing it in the Gujerati Hindu manner. Co-education existed from the beginning, with the result that the entire community of a hundred thousand odd is entirely literate today and always has been.

In the beginning the Parsis intermarried with the Hindus, but they soon closed their ranks to other communities. They

also built Fire Temples (*Atash Behrams*), the oldest being the one at Udvada in Gujerat. The Parsis traded with other Indians and socially mixed well but they jealously guarded their religion, refusing to proselytize or permit non-Parsis to enter their fire temples. The outward symbols of their faith are the *Sudreh* and *Kusti*. The Sudreh is a white muslin shirt with a V-shaped neck with a minute, square inch-size pocket at the intersection of the V. This is the "*Kisseh Kerfeh*" or "Pocket of Good Deeds". The *Kusti* symbolizes the true doctrine as taught by Zarathushtra. The *Sudreh*, which is also called *Vohu Manik Vastra* or "Garment of Good Mind", symbolizes purity, while the *Kusti* is the badge of service to show that the wearer serves the one true God, Ahura Mazda, Lord of Life and Wisdom. The *Sudreh* and *Kusti* are first worn at the *Navjote* ceremony, which is the new birth or initiation ceremony when the child of Parsi parents is taken into the Zoroastrian fold.

The scriptures of the Parsis are known as the *Avesta* and consist of lengthy compilations written by diverse hands and spreading over many centuries. The most important of the texts contained in the *Avesta* are the *Gathas* or Divine Songs composed by Zarathushtra himself, with occasional verses by his disciples. The *Gathas* are the only authentic documents containing the life and teachings of the Prophet. According to Zarathushtra, the twin goals of spiritual living, Perfection and Immortality, can only be gained after a long life spent in rooting out wickedness in the world. Evil first came into the world when men exercised the possibility of evil in the dual nature of their own minds. This caused confusion and brought down Aeshma, Demon of Wrath and Blood Lust, into power. In this way the spiritual life of man became diseased. But to the true believers, the *Ashavants* or Followers of Truth, God gives Himself and His Divine Powers for their protection. To the wicked comes "the retribution of their own deeds" so that they eat the "wormwood and gall of their own thoughts and acts" in the House of the Lie. When their excesses bring a revulsion against evil, the wicked, prompted by the Good Mind within them, turn and surrender themselves

"into the two hands of Asha" who is God's Divine Law and Order, His Righteousness and Truth. Thus all mankind, and Nature too, will one day be redeemed. This redemption is called the *Frasho-kereti*, the Great Renewal'.

As the language of the *Gathas* is closely allied to the language of the *Rigveda*, scholars assume that Zarathushtra was born around 1,000 B.C. A later tradition asserts that he was born "258 years before Alexander", which Western scholars interpret as between 600 and 583 B.C. It is remarkable that Zarathushtra should have had such a profound grasp of spiritual truths several centuries before the birth of Buddha and Christ. Zarathustra is, perhaps, the first prophet in history to teach of a God of Spirit and Truth. It is a touching tribute to this ancient faith, whose scriptures are in fragments, that, at the Bhandarkar Institute in Poona, several Hindu scholars have vowed to devote their lives to the editing of every single text of the *Avesta* in the original, and to the translation into Hindi of the entire Zoroastrian scriptures.

CHRISTIANITY

The Christians in India also lay great stress on a life of practical good works, especially in a country where the need for such work is so compelling. The Syrian Christian Church in the South is the oldest in India. It was founded by St. Thomas the Apostle, about 70 A.D. According to the tradition still prevalent in the South, St. Thomas landed on the West Coast at Cochin. A slab of stone, on which he is believed to have first set foot on landing, is still preserved in the Carmelite Monastery at Cannanore. He died a martyr's death, being shot by an arrow when conducting a service in Mylapore, Madras.

After the Syrian Christians in the South, the second largest Christian denomination is that of the Roman Catholics. Roman Catholicism was first introduced into India by St. Francis Xavier in the 17th century. The Jesuit Fathers founded many monasteries and educational institutions all

over India and have done outstanding work in educating the poor and nursing the sick. Catholic nuns also have devoted their lives to selfless service among the poor. Until fairly recently, the nursing profession was almost entirely in their hands. Moreover, they took a keen interest in the education of girls and women teachers. Several teaching orders, such as that of Loreto (Irish), and that of Jesus and Mary, flourish to this day, as the numerous convent schools for girls found all over the country testify. Besides participating in the professions of teaching and nursing, Catholic nuns have founded many orphanages and creches.

Like the Syrian Christians and the Roman Catholics, the numerous Protestant sects in India have done excellent work in the field of education, especially medical education. Dr. Edith Brown, who died recently at the age of 92, founded the Ludhiana Medical College at Ludhiana in the Punjab. Other outstanding Protestant missionaries were Dr. Ida Scudder, who founded the Christian Medical College at Vellore, and Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), the learned Maharashtrian lady whose conversion to Christianity came when she was nearing forty years of age. She founded hostels for Hindu widows and orphans and was greatly helped in her work by the great Liberal leaders in Indian politics who lived in her day, *viz.*, Gokhale, Tilak, Ranade, Chandavarkar and others.

JUDAISH

The small community of Indian Jews, numbering around 26,000, are mainly of Beni-Israel descent and are congregated chiefly in Gujerat, Maharashtra, the Konkan and Bengal. In South India also, there are a few descendants of White Russian Jews, as the documents preserved in two ancient synagogues at Ernakulam and Trivandrum bear witness. Indian Jews, like the Parsis, are found for the most part in the professions. Dr. Miss Mary Jhirad, for instance, was formerly superintendent of the Cama Hospital in Bombay, and even now takes

a prominent part in the activities of the All India Women's Medical Association.

JAINISM

Although the Jains number a million and a half, their faith is usually looked upon as an off-shoot of Hinduism. They have their own temples and institutions. Their historical founder, Vardhamana (599-527 B.C.) was a Kshatriya by caste, the son of the head of the warrior house of Jnatrikas who lived near Videha. He led the life of a *sansari* or householder up to the age of 30, having married and settled down, but after the death of his parents he renounced his home and turned a *sanyasi* or ascetic, wandering from place to place for 13 years. During this period he practised severe austerities and acquired immense spiritual knowledge so that he was called Mahavira, the great hero, and Jina, the conqueror. He preached chiefly in Magadha and Videha, and met his death at Pawa near Giribraja (Rajgir).

The Jain Scriptures are known as *Agama*, and were handed down by word of mouth for nearly a thousand years. After that they were written and preserved in Prakrit. The Jains lay stress on the practice of *yoga* and deep contemplation, on outward and inward austerities and on fasting, even unto death if thereby the soul may be freed from fleshly desires and attain *moksha* or salvation. They believe intensely in the sanctity of all life, even of the minutest of creatures. Hence, Jain priests and priestesses wear a small kerchief over the mouth and nose so that no invisible insect may, even inadvertently, meet its death by their agency.

The Jains are found in all walks of life. Their architecture is very distinctive, and their contributions have enriched Indian literature, grammar and astronomy.

BUDDHISM

The 500,000 Buddhists in the country have contributed even more to the enrichment of our spiritual heritage. At their monasteries and educational centres at Gaya, Ranchi and elsewhere, they train men and women in contemplation, serenity and right action. Their founder, Prince Siddhartha (563-483 B.C.), also known as Gautama, was a Kshatriya, the son of Suddhodana, king of the Sakyas, and was born at Lumbini near Kapilavastu in Nepal. Like Mahavira, his early life was spent in the contentment of a happy domestic life and, like Mahavira, he too renounced home to seek out the meaning of suffering and the purpose of human life. He practised many austerities and wandered through many cities in his search for ultimate truth. Unlike the founder of Jainism, however, he renounced asceticism and austerities as the means to an end. He was named the Buddha, or Enlightened One, when the Truth was revealed to him in meditation as he sat beneath a *pipal* tree in Gaya. This Truth he embodied in his doctrine of the Eightfold Path, which he called the Middle Way between asceticism and pleasure. He taught that pain was the outcome of desire, and that Freedom from human longings could be achieved by rooting out anger, hatred, envy and wrong thinking. These evil passions were to be replaced by infinite love and compassion for the whole of creation. According to Buddha, the goal of every human being is *Nirvana* or Bliss, no empty abstraction but that profound "peace which passeth all understanding" of which the Bible speaks. Hence, the Buddhists bring to their work a detachment and inner joy which is felt by everyone associated with them.

The Buddhist Scriptures are preserved in Ceylon in a text named the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets), written in Pali. The *Jatakas*, or birth stories of the Buddha, were written in the 3rd century B.C., and though apocryphal in part they embody, in lively form, various aspects of the Buddha's teaching.

Buddhism is the only major religion in history free from the taint of religious wars.

MODERN INDIA

In the hearts and minds of millions of India's citizens is the strong conviction that God exists. As Guru Nanak so finely said:

> Were I given a hundred thousand tongues instead of one,
> And the hundred thousand multiplied twenty-fold,
> A hundred thousand times would I say, and say again.
> The Lord of all the worlds is one.
> That is the path that leads,
> These the steps that mount,
> Ascend thus to the Lord's mansion
> And with Him be joined in unison.

This does not mean there are no atheists and agnostics in India. There are some such, but they take refuge in the dignity of silence, for they realise they have not yet experienced God and therefore have little claim to pronounce on His existence or non-existence. India is the one country in the world today where so many and diverse spiritual disciplines flourish that it is comparatively easy for any individual to submit himself to one suiting his temperament and cultural background, and thus "discover" God for himself. The common attitude of all the religious sects in India is summed up in this beautiful verse:

> Meditate on Him, the Perfect, the Embodiment of Bliss;
> Mediate on Him, the Formless, the Root of the universe;
> The Hearer behind the ear, the Thinker behind the mind;
> The Speaker behind the tongue, Himself beyond all words:
> He is the Life of life, the Ultimate, the Adorable.

EDUCATION

Muriel Wasi

Wherever the story of education is told, whether in the supposedly advanced countries of the world or in Asia, that is economically backward, we are aware of pockets of ignorance that have remained pockets of ignorance for centuries. The interesting thing about these pockets is that they represent not just a conglomeration of individuals who have been left behind in the procession of learning and progress, but a class of persons whom it has sometimes 'paid' to keep ignorant.

Even as late as the 19th century there were learned men and not so learned women in Britain who could and did argue against higher education for women. There probably still are several hundreds of people in various parts of the world who argue against giving women more than the bare elements of a school education. It cannot be that these people are unaware of the uses to which women can put education. The explanation is either that they are afraid of certain social disorders that may follow upon the education of women, or that they believe quite genuinely, if misguidedly, that to educate a woman formally beyond a certain stage is to make her unfit for the life that is designed to bring her the greatest happiness, *i.e.*, the life of the wife and mother.

Any controversy on this issue—and every controversy is a live one—turns on certain axioms that no educated woman of today will concede. But as discussion about an axiom leads nowhere, it is as well for those of us who believe axiomatically that the education of women is a good thing to survey the story of women's education in India and to prove our points empirically. The onus is on us to establish that the educated Indian woman is an asset, the uneducated Indian woman a liability. That, once established in concrete terms, will obviate further academic discussion on the subject of woman's natural and/or constitutional rights.

The history of Indian education reveals a variety of odd superstitions that have held back the education of women. Thus William Adam, in the second of his valuable reports on education in Bengal, wrote :

> Of the total female population, 16,792, are between fourteen and five years of age, that is, are of the age at which the mind is capable of receiving in an increasing degree the benefit of instruction in letters. The state of instruction amongst this unfortunate class cannot be said to be low for, with a very few individual exceptions, there is no instruction at all. Absolute and hopeless ignorance is in general their lot. The notion of providing the means of instruction for female children never enters into the minds of parents; and girls are equally deprived of that imperfect domestic instruction which is sometimes given to boys. A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by the men, that a girl taught to write and read will soon after marriage become a widow, an event which is regarded as nearly the worst misfortune that can befall the sex; and the belief is also generally entertained in native society that intrigue is facilitated by a knowledge of letters on the part of females. Under influence of these fears, there is not only nothing done in a native family to promote female instruction, but an anxiety is often evinced to discourage any inclination to acquire the most elementary knowledge.

As William Adam consistently used the language understatement, what he says may be taken to be a factual report of the situation in Bengal at the beginning of the 19th century.

Conditions in Bombay were not much better. Between 1823 and 1829 no girl pupils attended indigenous schools. Jervis does report the existence of domestic instruction for girls among some Muslim families, and there is evidence that this existed among high caste Hindu families as well, but the actual number of women thus educated was pathetically small.

A social or educational cause always in course of time discovers a champion, and the cause of women's education discovered its first important champion in Raja Ram Mohan Roy, aptly known for this, as for other reasons, as the Father of Modern India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy stood for the more equitable and humane treatment of women. He was a staunch champion of their education, roundly condemned polygamy and in his will disinherited any son or descendant who would have more than one wife at a time. He had his one daughter

married at the age of 16 and was outspokenly opposed to child marriage. In an age when most men believed that women were their intellectual inferiors, he declined to accept the alleged inferiority of women. Avoiding appeals to the new education that he himself respected but that might not cut ice with the orthodox, he took his stand on the old *shastras* and proved convincingly that in ancient times the women of India were highly educated and that the education of women was in keeping with ancient religious traditions and beliefs.

SECULAR SCHOOL EXPERIMENT

Several experiments in the Indian educational field were also made by British officials working in a private capacity. One of these was J. E. D. Bethune, Law Member of the Executive Council of the Governor-General and President of the Council of Education from 1848 to 1851. Convinced that respectable Hindus would not educate their daughters in mission schools because of the missionary insistence on religious instruction, Bethune decided to establish a secular school for Indian girls and to bear the expenses himself.

The success of the school, that began to function in May 1849, was phenomenal. Within a short while it attracted a large number of girls whose eagerness to learn, docility and quickness corresponded, in the opinion of Bethune, to those of the boys and even surpassed "what is found among European girls of the same age". But even more important were two other results: enlightened Indians at once came forward to support the experiment and the example of the school was copied elsewhere.

Dramatic and significant as Ram Mohan Roy's and Bethune's reforms in education were, these were only the first steps in public recognition of the need for education among women. In order to be truly effective, teaching such as this requires

to be backed by legislation. The Indian Education Commission of 1882-83 reviewed the situation and made the following observations:—

> Female education is still in an extremely backward condition and needs to be fostered in every legitimate way. In some provinces, the sympathies of the people do not yet run sufficiently in this direction to induce local bodies to devote to female education any of the funds at their disposal. Hence we think it expedient that public funds of all kinds—local, municipal and provincial—should be chargeable in an equitable proportion for the support of girls' schools as well as boy's schools; and that the former, being in an earlier stage of development, should receive even something more than that might appear to be a strictly impartial share of encouragement.

On the subject of popular prejudice against the education of girls, the Commission went on to say:

> One great objection made by the native public to the instruction of the girls is that it is of no practical use to them. Too much stress should not be laid on this as the value of education to a woman must of necessity be unknown to those who have no experience of it. But it ought not to be taken for granted that the instruction which is suitable for boys must necessarily be good for an Indian girl.

On women teachers the Commission said:

> We have seen that one of the obstacles to the extension of female education is the difficulty of obtaining suitable teachers. There can be no doubt that women are preferable for this purpose to men; and while we would not altogether exclude male teachers from girls' schools we believe that female teachers should be gradually and cautiously substituted for them. In order to induce girls to look forward to teaching as a professsion, it seems desirable to encourage pupil-teachers wherever the system is practicable.

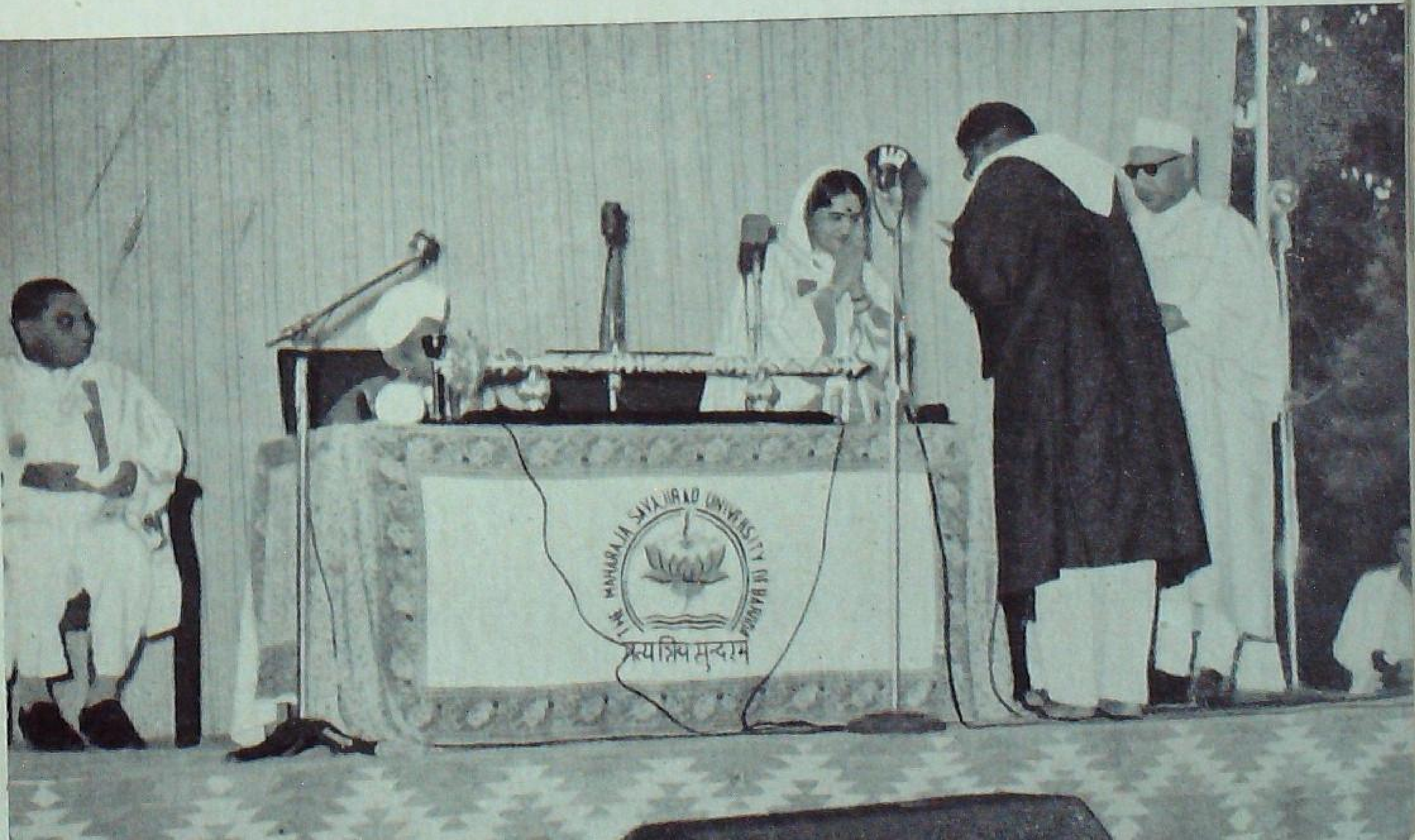
This was substantial progress on all heads but it did not touch a large class of women (who appear to have remained untouched by all campaigns for reform) up to the third decade of the 20th century. Literacy is not equivalent to education, but it is the first indispensable step towards it and in a country like India, where 88 per cent of the people were illiterate even in 1941, the extreme urgency of liquidating adult illiteracy needed no special pleading. Nevertheless, up to 1921, this problem received little attention. A few night schools were organized, but these were primary schools conducted at night rather than adult classes proper. In spite of the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission to

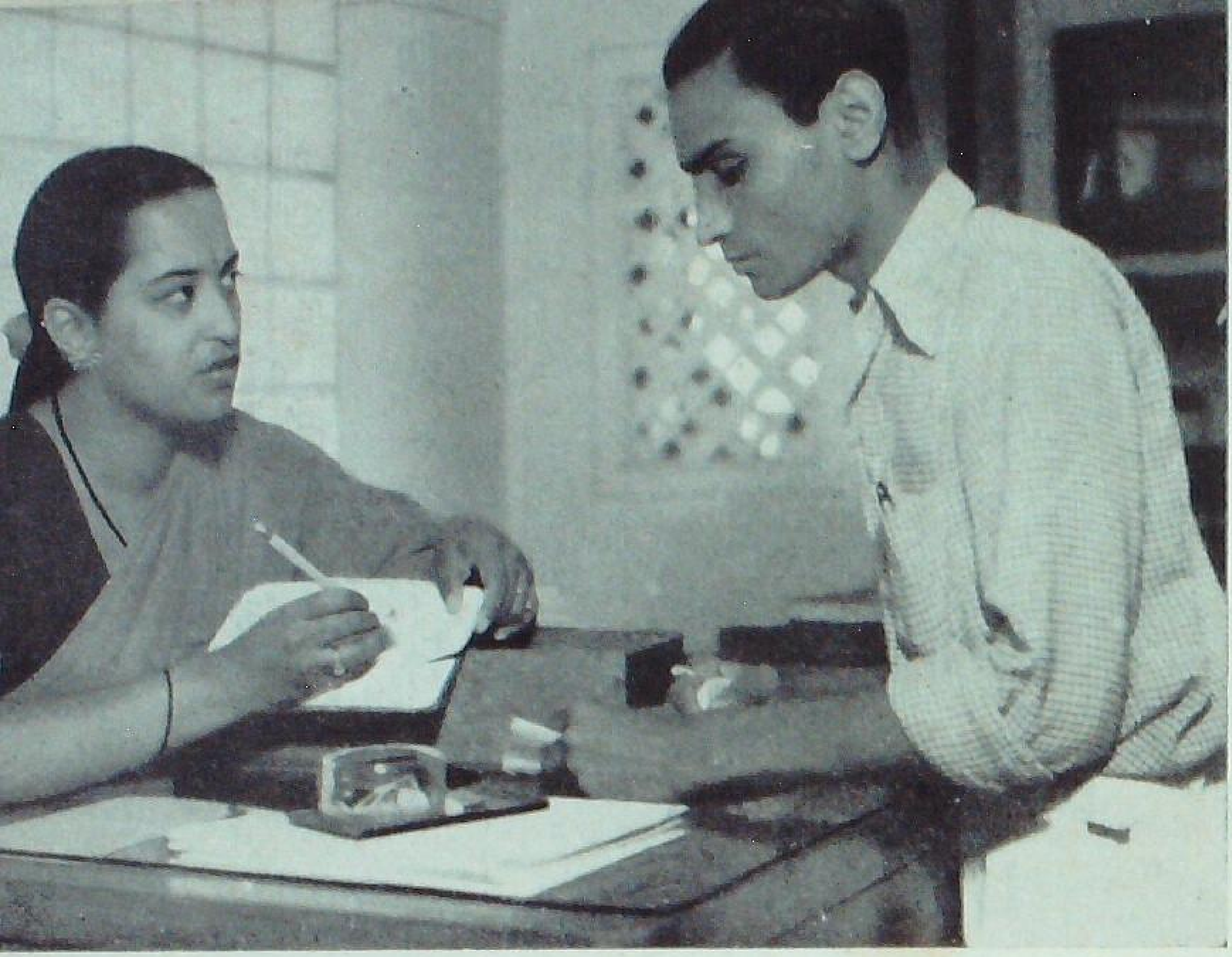
in the course of the last eight years. The State Governments are making attempts to introduce free and compulsory primary education for the age group 6–14. The total enrolment in secondary schools in March 31, 1950, was nearly 700,000 girls. On the corresponding date in 1953 the enrolment for middle schools only was 774,148 and at the high school stage 256,456. Grants, scholarships, free conveyance and other facilities have clearly been designed to encourage the education of girls. There are at present 33 Universities in India and except for one—Roorkee—,which is an engineering University, all provide for general education. One of these Universities—the S.N.D.T. Women's University, Bombay—is intended exclusively for women; all the others are open to both women and men. Founded in 1917, the S.N.D.T. Women's University has sought to provide cheap education specially suited to the needs and requirements of women. In 1949 the Bombay Government granted statutory recognition to this institution and it became a Chartered University. Between 1950 and 1953, the number of women at Indian Universities doubled and in the latter year was 63,424. Today there is no restriction upon a girl's studying at any kind of educational institution. In practice, however, few girls join institutions for engineering, technology, agriculture or veterinary science.

So much for the education of women in the urban areas of India. What of the vast countryside that is more typical of the sub-continent than the India of the big cities? Here women's education is still very backward indeed. Enrolment figures for girls after the first two years of elementary schooling are low compared with enrolment figures for boys. One of the main difficulties in improving this situation quickly is the shortage of women teachers. This, it will be remembered, was one of the special points made by the Education Commission of the eighties of the last century. On the recommendation of the Central Advisory Board of Education at a meeting in February 1956, the Central Ministry of Education requested the State Governments to take steps to encourage education of girls in the rural areas. Practical suggestions

Convocation scene, Bombay University

Hansa Mehta, Vice-Chancellor, Baroda University, conferring a degree



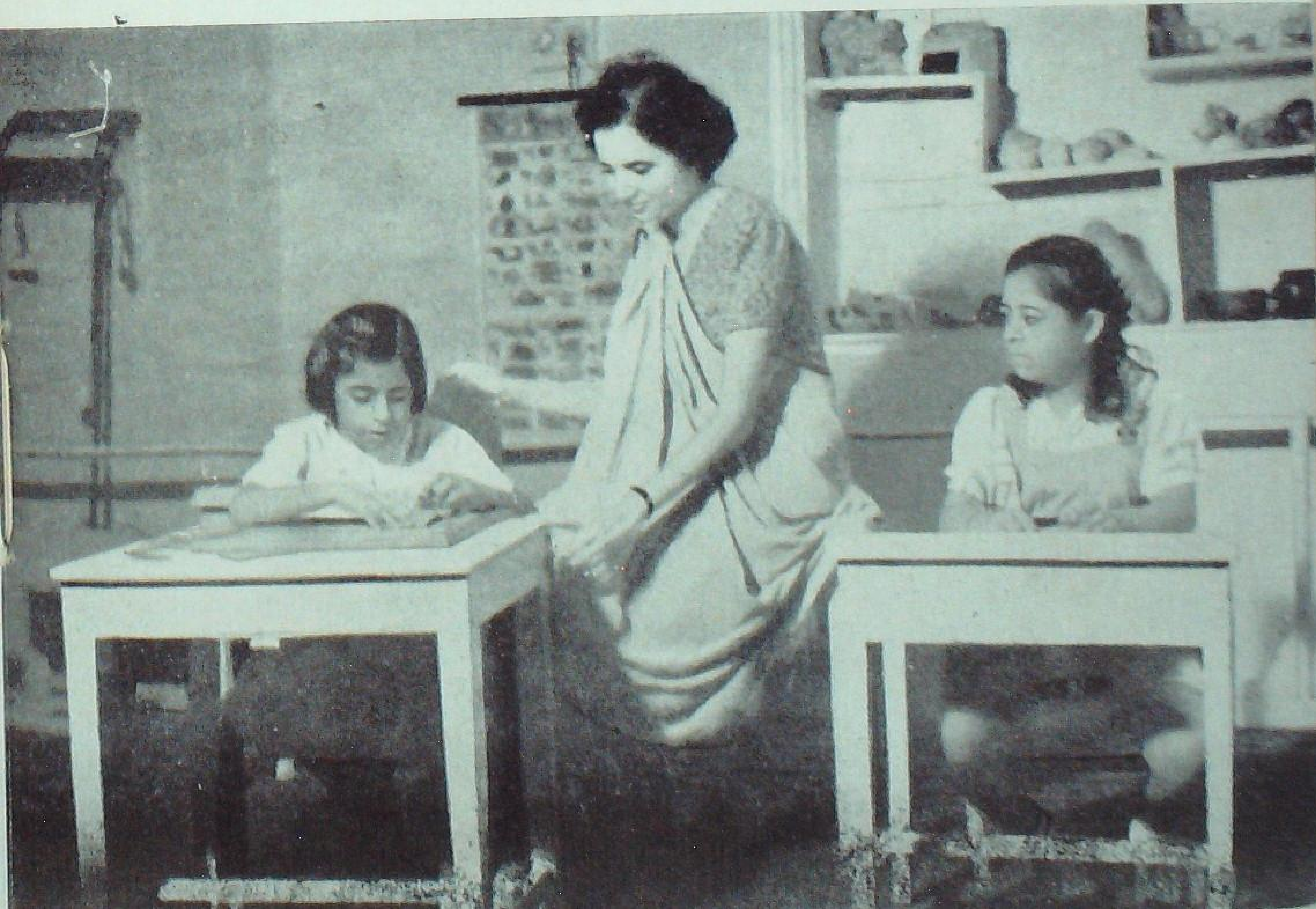


A librarian

In a public library

Miss Panandikar, Inspectress of Schools, dealing with files

Mrs. Jai Vakeel's school for handicapped children



Kulsum Sayani, President of the Adult Literacy Association, smiles as a woman teacher receives awards for her students from the Governor of Bombay

College girls

were made on how to draw women into the teaching profession. The Board's recommendations included the provision of rent-free accommodation within the school precincts, raising the maximum age-limit for recruitment of teachers to 40-45, relaxing the minimum educational qualifications for recruitment and exempting would-be teachers from tuition fees. Several of these recommendations have already been put into force by many State Governments.

BRILLIANT WOMEN

It is part of the fate of educationally backward countries—and there can be little doubt that we in India still fall into that category—to have at any given point of time a galaxy of distinguished and brilliant women who tend to create the impression that the women of the country are highly educated. Nor is this peculiar to the 20th century, for we can go back hundreds of years to Avvai of Madras and Anandamayee of Bengal, to Gulbadan Begum, daughter and sister of Moghul kings, to Nur Jehan, Jehanara, Mumtaz and the ill-fated Zebunnissa. In more recent times we have had Toru Dutta and Sarojini Naidu, the latter a voice rich and eloquent outside her own private realm of lyric poetry.

Singers, writers and orators resplendent in their singularity, however, do not constitute an educated people. It is the common run of women who must be educated if we are to claim to be an educated people. Today we have a woman ambassador, women Ministers in the Central and State Governments, women Members of Parliament and State legislatures, women in high office in the country's bureaucracy and women boldly invading the liberal professions of teaching, law, medicine, journalism and nursing.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that attitudes have changed even more than the numbers of educated women have risen. Prejudice against the working woman is dying, as die it must, for the times are with us. But we shall not be educated till the average woman of India is educated, and

this hangs upon the wisdom and deportment of the educated who are not average women. Upon the dignity and competence with which their day-to-day work is executed will depend the speed of the revolution in women's education. Nothing holds back the tide today except the ineffectiveness, for one reason or another, of women in public life. Upon their determination, compactness, good sense and efficiency rests the future of the education of women in India.

CREATIVE AND FINE ARTS

Enakshi Bhavnani

In writing about women's contribution to the creative and fine arts, one must consider that in India our entire art has been deeply influenced by both aesthetics and philosphical thought. Therefore, there is a close interlinking in every phase of artistic endeavour. One finds that many who were gifted in music, dance and fine arts expressed themselves also in poetry and composition and *vice versa.*

THE VEDIC AGE

Going back to the hoary past of the Vedic period about 2500 B.C., women occupied a high status in society and gave of their creative talents equally with men. Many gifted women composed sacred hymns that were included in the *Rigveda*, the earliest literature in the world. They also excelled as musicians, dancers, poetesses, philosophers and patronesses of the arts.

That women took a prominent part in the Vedic rituals because of their talents in music, which they learnt as part of their education, is evident from the *Rigveda*, where mention is made that they sang on ceremonial occasions, and played on a variety of rare instruments such as the *vina*, the *kanda vina*, the *taluka vina*, the *apaghatalika*, the *pichhra*, as well as lutes, horns and drums. In this sacred book reference is also made to women dancing. Some of the other treatises speak of several arts that cultured women mastered, including singing, dancing, painting, playing on musical instruments, poetry, compositions, dramatics, flower decoration, designing and so on.

One of the notable poetesses in the Vedic age was *Vac*, who wrote a hymn known as *Devi-Sukta*, used in the autumn worship of the Goddess *Devi*, an ethical psalm identifying

Self with the Universe. Vishwavara and Apala were both inspired hymn composers, and Ghosha wrote two hymns in the 10th book of the *Rigveda*.

In the *Upanishad* period, about 1,000 B.C.-500 B.C., Maitreyi and her daughter Gargi were prominent philosophers and distinguished themselves in the art of rhetoric. The *Mahabharata* of the Epic period makes mention of Uttara, daughter of King Virata, and her companions who were adepts in dancing, singing and instrumental music; while Madhavi, daughter of King Yayati, was an expert in music. Again, in the *Dwarka Lila*, one of the early Indian Epics, the princess Usha's maid of honour, Chitralekha, was a portrait painter of great talent who sketched the portraits of the noblemen of her time to help identify Aniruddha, the grandson of Sri Krishna.

BUDDHIST PERIOD

Not less talented were the women of the Buddhist period, when the *Theri-Gatha* (Songs of the Nuns), became a volume of conspicuously noteworthy psalms consisting of more than 500 verses in praise of the Buddha's teachings. They were composed by a number of Buddhist Sisters or *bhikkhunis*.

Noting these facts, one gains a general picture of the varied creative talents of our women in those early days. History abounds with instances of women's artistic talents through the centuries, and it would be interesting to make a brief survey of at least some of the prominent names through the ages. As far back as the 2nd century A.D., with the advent of Mahayana Buddhism, three queens of Andhra reconstructed the ancient *stupa* on the right bank of the Krishna river at Amaravati into perhaps the largest *stupa* of the period and contributed towards the erection of another group of splendid monuments in the same region.

In the 7th century, a queen of the Pallava king Ranga-pathaka inspired the building of the famous Kailashnatha temple at Kanchi, considered to be the most beautiful specimen

of architecture of that period. Again, Queen Loka-Mahadevi, wife of the Chalukya king Vikramaditya of Badami, built the temple of Lokeshwara at Bijapur, noted for its exquisite workmanship. She supported many musicians and dancers: one of them, Achala, distinguished herself, and founded a school of classical dance.

Sembiyan Madhavi, a Malwa princess, wife of King Gandaradiya (950 A.D.) devoted her fortune to the building of temples of architectural beauty, and encouraged the sculpture of thousands of bronzes and golden images representing various forms of Siva. In addition, her love of music caused her to support the chanting of the *Vedas* in the temples, and to maintain many musicians, singers and dancers. The *Rajatarangini* (Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir), mentions that Didda (958-1003 A.D.), daughter of King Simharaja of Lohara, spent her life building temples, monasteries and cities in a great cultural urge. Kundavi, a Chola queen and elder sister of the celebrated patron of the arts, Rajaraja I, was another great temple builder. She constructed a Vishnu and a Siva temple at Dadapura and a Jain temple at Tirumalai, all in the Tamil country.

JAIN PERIOD

Coming to the Jain period, Shridevi, wife of Vimala, Minister of King Bhimadeva of Patan (1088 A.D.), helped her husband in getting one of the splendid marble temples erected at Mount Abu. Lakkale, wife of the famed Jain general, Ganga Raja, erected a magnificent Jain shrine at Sravana Belgola in Mysore State. It was on the advice of Anupama that her husband, General Tajahpala, built the magnificent Dilwara marble temple at Mount Abu, world-renowned for its exquisite carvings and purity of architectural design. Anupama was a patroness of music, too, and is also credited with having written the *Kankana-Kavya* system of philosophy. These are a few examples of the contribution of noble women in ancient India in architecture and sculpture.

Turning to music, dance and drama in ancient India, we can mention, among a host of brilliant women, Avanti Sundari (885-908 A.D.) who had several dramas staged, the outstanding one being *Karpura-Manjari*, written by her husband Rajashekhara, a distinguished dramatist of the time. Rebbaladevi, a scholar, painter and musician of quality, deeply influenced by Vedic lore, built in Bellary district in Andhra a notable temple dedicated to Keshavadeva. The saintly Shantaladevi, queen of the Hoysala king, Vishmvardhanadeva, was a noted musician, singer and dancer, and was instrumental in building several Jain shrines.

Since women were so accomplished in music and song and the dance, we must mention among many gifted women famed for their beautiful lyrics three interesting personalities. The first, Kodhai (Andal), who lived in the 9th century A.D., was authoress of the *Tirumoli* and *Tiruppavai*–devotional songs, dedicated to Sri Krishna, which are considered among the most remarkable lyrics in Tamil literature. Avvai, a poetess of great merit, wrote beautiful odes depicting contemporary Tamil life in the 11th century. These are found in the Sangam collections. Both in their marvellous delineation of the Aryan and Tamil cultural concepts and as pieces of lyrical composition they are believed to rank along with the best in the world. The third of these personalities, Janabai, was a noted 14th century poetess of Maharashtra. Her *abhangas* are chanted in *kirtans* (devotional songs) as well as famous *bhajans* (sacred songs) to this day.

MEDIEVAL INDIA AND THE MOGHUL PERIOD

Medieval India and the Moghul period were notable for distinguished women who continued to bear the torch of art in its various forms. Among Hindu women, Oduva-Tirumalamba—poetess, musician, grammarian and scholar of Sanskrit, drama and philosophy—queen of King Achutaraya of Vijayanagar, is an outstanding name. Mriganayana (1486-1516 A.D.) queen of Raja Man Singh of Gwalior, specialized in a classic style of mixed *raga* melodies (*samkirna*), and her

compositions have come to posterity in the form of *Gujari, Bahul Gujari, Mal Gujari* and *Mangal Gujari*. Rupamati of Malwa (15th centlry A.D.) was a poetess and musician of distinction. The Songs of Rupamati in the Malwa dialect of Hindi are considered masterpieces by singers and musicians of note.

The immortal Mirabai (1504-1550) daughter of Rana Ratan Singh of Merta, near Ajmer, was one of the greatest of our singers and composers of *bhajans*. Sung in the Vraja language mixed with a Rajasthani dialect, her celebrated songs in praise of Sri Krishna are known throughout India. She is also credited with authorship of the *Raga Govind* and an illuminating commentary on the poet Jayadev. In addition, this saintly Princess built one of the famous Krishna temples at Mewar.

Muddupalani (1739-1763), a courtesan's daughter at the court of Tanjore, was highly educated in Sanskrit and Telugu. She was expert in dance and music and was a poetess and a *vina* player *par excellence*. Her great musical talents are evident in her *Ashtapadi*, a Telugu rendering of Jayadev's lyrical work of the same time.

Among Muslim women, Gulbadan Begum (1523 A.D.) poetess-daughter of Babar, immortalized her name by writing the *Humayun-Namah*, a valuable contemporary record in beautiful text of the life of the Emperor and his family.

Nur Jehan (Light of the World) (1574-1646) brilliant and beautiful, wife of the Emperor Jehangir, was a woman blessed with great artistic, intellectual and administrative gifts. She was known for the many original and aesthetic ideas which she introduced into the culinary art, jewellery, ornaments and costumes and was reputed to be the inventor of "attar of roses". Accorded credit for the fine tomb erected to her father I'timad-ud-daula, Prime Minister at the Moghul court, this famous woman of Indian history was also a great lover of nature and inspired her husband in the building of some of the finest Moghul gardens, such as the famed Shalimar (Garden of Love), Verinag and Acchabal Gardens in Kashmir.

Jehanara Begum (1613-1683 A.D.), talented daughter of the Emperor Shah Jehan and Mumtaz Mahal, took great interest in both architecture and decorative gardens. She

added a large and chaste hall to the sanctuary of Khwaja Mohinuddin, one of the Chisti saints of India, at Ajmer, and also wrote biographical treatises on the saint and his followers, which have been collected in the *Munis-al-Arwah.* She built the famous Jami Masjid at Agra and the mosque of Mulla Badakhshi in Kashmir. In addition, she was responsible for several historic Moghul gardens in Delhi and Agra.

Zebunnisa (17th century), the accomplished daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb, possessed great skill in calligraphy and wrote elegant verses of rare beauty under the pen-name of "Makhfi", which have been collected in the volume *Diwan-i-Makhi.* Because of her love of Persian poetry, several distinguished scholars wrote and flourished under her patronage.

Gavaribai (18th century) is the best known poetess of Gujerat. She wrote more than 650 devotional lyrics of conspicuous beauty.

Turning to painting, there is Sahifa Banu, whose fine and delicate work (preserved in the Wantage Bequest in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), is described as a portrait of Shah Tahmasp I, the king of Persia with whom the Emperor Humayun took refuge. Belonging to the Moghul period, it is the only Moghul Miniature signed by a woman painter. Manaku (1730 A.D.), patroness of the arts, was apparently from the Royal house of Basohli State. She got the *Git Govinda* series illustrated by an eminent artist. The painting in this series bearing the inscription stating these facts is in the Lahore Museum. This is one of the most beautiful sets in the Basohli School of Pahari-Rajput Miniature painting.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The 19th century had many distinguished women artists. Para, a talented painter of the Kangra School of Rajput Miniature painting of the late 19th century, was greatly respected by contemporary painters.

The former Film Star and Director, Devika Rani Roerich, during the Film Seminar of the Sangeet Natak Akadami

State Awards for culture : Rukmini Devi Arundale, the famous dancer, receiving an award from the President

Golden-voiced singer from the South, M. S. Subbalakshmi as Mira

One of Amrita Sher-Gil's memorable paintings of Indian women

Film stars on a cultural delegation to the U.S.S.R. and other East European countries

Mrinalini Sarabhai and her troupe on a tour of South-East Asia

Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932), sister of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, possessed great literary talent and was a gifted musician and painter. She wrote historical and social novels, dramas, farces, lyrics and poems.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In present times, the first distinguished name in the realm of the dance is the late Menaka (Smt. Leila Sokhey), friend and associate of Anna Pavlova. Menaka revived and introduced on the stages of India and Europe the *Kathak*, the classical dance of North India. By her deep study and love of the art, she presented it in its pure forms through exquisitely arranged ballets. The unforgettable *Radha-Krishna* and *Moghul Miniature* ballets are among memorable works that brought to audiences the world over this ancient art. She was one of the pioneers of Indian dance, revealing the richness of choreography that could be made available from the dance in India for a wide array of creative ballets. Later, she established a school at Khandala, Bombay State, where many earnest dancers received a thorough training in the classical form of *Kathak* and its varied techniques.

Balasaraswathi is a dancer whose name stands as a shining example of women's achievement in the renaissance of *Bharata Natyam*, the classical dance of the South. She interprets its dynamic techniques and dramatic content with flawless skill. Her great success and the dramatic appeal of her preformances have inspired many young dancers to study this ancient art seriously.

Gauri Devi, talented daughter of the eminent painter, Nandalal Bose, was another pioneer to take up the Indian dance seriously. She made her mark when, in 1917, she appeared in the leading role of the dance-drama *worship of the Dancing Girl*, done in the Manipur dance technique and based on the play by the poet Rabindranath Tagore and with his musical composition.

Besides Varalakshmi of Kumbakonam and Gouri Bai of Baroda, there is Rukmini Devi of Madras, who mastered the art of *Bharata Natyam* and popularized it throughout India by her artistic presentations and the introduction of this school through ballet and dance-drama. Her memorable *Kumarasambhava* ballet is one of them. Through her Kalakshetra Art Centre, Rukmini Devi has trained dozens of dancers who are now artist of standing. The Kalakshetra was not only a dance centre but a remarkable school where for 10 years Maria Montessori propagated her revolutionary principles of child education. It was also a boarding school on simple Indian principles where art and music were emphasized and the exquisite silk and brocade-weaving techniques of South India were revived.

Mrinalini Sarabhai, director of Dharpana, a dance society which is sponsored by the Karmakshetra Educational Foundation of Ahmedabad, has contributed much to the revival of the classical and folk dances of India. She has presented these in ballets and solo performances throughout India and the West. She was recently sent by the Government of India on a Cultural Delegation to South-East Asia. Of particular note are her ballets *Kiratarjuna*, in pure classical style; *Vasanta Vijayam* in *Kathakali* technique; *Abhisarika*, a romantic story in the *Bharata Natyam* style, and *Vasavadatta*, a famed classical story in folk art form.

Many younger dancers have been adding laurels to Indian women's contribution in the renaissance of classical and folk dances. Among them may be mentioned Shanta Rao, noted exponent of the ancient *Mohini Attam* of Malabar and the *Bharata Natyam* and *Kathakali* schools. She is considered one of the finest exponents of pure *Bharata Natyam.* Kumari Kamala is a charming young dancer and former infant prodigy from South India, an exponent of *Bharata Natyam* who, with her special grace and wonderfully expressive interpretation, has brought a compelling popularity to the art. Kumudini and Shevanti have graced the stages of India and abroad in the Ram Gopal ballets. Indrani Rahman, the Travancore sisters, Vijayantimala, Sarla Sehgal, Tara Chaudhury, Shirin

and Roshan Vazifdar, Vinoo Indrani, Anjali Hora and Satiavati have all established themselves as dancers of quality in *Bharata Natyam.* Roshan Kumari, Damayanti Joshi and Rani Karna are fine exponents of *Kathak.* The Jhaveri sisters, Nyana and Ranjan, who have depicted the lilting beauty of the dances of Manipur through several ballets produced by the Indian National Theatre, are among other enthusiasts who have brought to the Indian dance a fresh impetus and popularity.

THE INDIAN THEATRE

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay has been one of the greatest pioneers in the revival of the theatre movement in India. One of the first cultured women to participate actively years ago on the amateur stage, her years of devoted and untiring efforts bore fruit first in the Indian National Theatre and later in the Sangeet Natak Akadami. She is President of the Theatre Centre, India, affiliated to the Theatre Institute of UNESCO.

Two of her most recent successes are the sponsoring, through the Sangeet Natak Akadami and the Theatre Centre, Delhi, of the first National Drama Festival in 1954, when more than 1,000 entrants from all over the country responded and made history in our growing theatre movement. She is the founder and President of the Indian Academy of Dramatic Arts, the first of its kind in India for teaching the various aspects of dramatics. Here instruction is given in English and Hindi and plays are produced in four languages. In 1956, she was unanimously elected President of the First World Theatre Congress of the International Theatre Institute of UNESCO held in Bombay.

Kamaladevi, as Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board, has also given of her talents to the reorganization and advancement of India's traditional handicrafts.

Himadevi is well known in the theatre movement in India, to which she has made her own unique contribution. Licentiate

of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts of London, she has shown talent as a producer, director and actress, using English as her dramatic medium. A fine classical dancer also, the dance-drama is her special field.

In the field of Indian opera, Sheila Bhatia has been a pioneer. Her production, in December 1956, of *Heer Ranjha*, under the auspices of the Delhi Arts Theatre, is a unique creative work employing folk music and the original verse of this Punjabi classic by the poet mystic, Waris Shah.

Nirmala Joshi, a musician and singer of quality, has done much constructive work as Secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akadami, the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, which organised the First National Music Festival in 1953.

In Delhi, the first professional theatre group, called Hindustani Theatre, whose Director is Moneeka Misra, was started in 1957. Much of the pioneer work for this venture was done by Begum Qudsia Zaidi.

INDIAN FILMS

Among the long list of women artistes who have done yeoman service in raising this creative art to a major industry, two leading personalities may be mentioned.

One is Devika Rani Roerich, the beautiful and talented grand-niece of Rabindranath Tagore. As early as 1930 she took the lead in the first Indian talkie made for the home and international markets, called *Kismet*. Other films followed, such as *Achut Kanya*, *Savitri*, *Jeevan Parbat* and *Durga*. Later, she became the first Indian woman film producer.

Deeply interested in the future of Indian films and of establishing them in a place of dignity in the creative arts, as Executive Director of the Sangeet Natak Akadami she organized the first National Film Seminar in 1955, when representatives of the entire film world came together for the first time on a common platform.

Durga Khote is a gifted singer and a stage, film and radio star. She is considered one of the pillars of the Marathi stage.

Her contributions to the theatre through the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya won her in 1954 the gold medal in the National Drama Festival. In her brilliant career in films she has introduced to this dramatic art a spendid dignity. Among her numerous performances, noted for their varied character, are those in *Seeta*, *Maya Machindra*, *Amar Jyoti* and *Bharat Milap*, for which she has won gold medals and acting honours.

Music too has been maintained on a high plane owing to the contributions of many illustrious women. One can cite the great Dhanam of South India, celebrated *vina* player and singer. M. S. Subbalakshmi, the golden-voiced singer of the South, has brought to the revival of classical music a beauty and sweetness of interpretation and technique that has won her the highest honours and made her a household name throughout the country. Through her, the melodies in the southern technique have come to be appreciated all over India, and her beautiful renderings of the immortal lyrics of Mirabai are a source of national pride.

Hirabai Barodkar is a distinguished singer from Bombay State whose mastery over classical music and whose many recitals have placed her among our most noted singers.

Kesarbai Kerkar, also from Bombay State, was one of the earliest recipients of the President's Award for eminence in music and the first woman musician to gain this distinction. A finished singer, she combines deep knowledge of the *ragas* and their combinations with excellent total quality.

D. K. Pattamall is one of our foremost singers haling from Madras State. She can be counted among the leading exponents of classical music of India. Her command of the intricate variations and abstract forms of the melodies and her rich voice production have made her an outstanding exponent of Carnatic music.

POPULAR MUSIC

There are several well-known singers who have specialized in light classical music. Begum Akhtar of Lucknow is one

Comolata Dutta is an outstanding name among musicians and composers both in Indian and Western music. She has given concerts of her works in London and in the leading cities and her compositions have been broadcast in India, the Commonwealth countries and America. Among her celebrated compositions are the *Radha-Krishna* and *Hindu Wedding* ballet music done for Anna Pavlova, and her recent *Legend of the Taj Mahal* composed for the Ram Gopal ballets. She was head of the Board of Studies for Indian and Western Music in Nagpur University and is now producer of western music programmes at All India Radio. Comolata Dutt is one of the few women who is not only an accomplished pianist and elected Fellow of the Trinity College of Music with a distinguished career at the Paris Conservatoire of Music, but plays the *sitar* and *tablah* in Indian classical music.

Olga Athaide Craen is another leading name. A brilliant pianist, she is a Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music of London and has played to large enthusiastic audiences in India, Britain, France, Switzerland and Holland. In October 1946 she was one of the prize-winners of the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud International Music Competition at Paris. She continues to be one of our leading pianists and most successful teacher.

Philomena Thumboo Chetty made her name as one of the first Indian women to achieve distinction as a violinist. A graduate of the Conservatoire of Music of Paris, she has given several recitals both in India and abroad.

Shanti Seldon is a well-known pianist in western classical music who has delighted audiences as a soloist in symphony concerts, in her own recitals and on All India Radio.

Gool Tata is a most successful teacher of western music. A Licentiate of the Trinity College of Music in the violin, she has conducted her own orchestra at concerts in which her pupils have been the participants. She is also a composer and has gained recognition both in India and America for her *Melodie Orientale, Moto Perpetuo, Cradle Song* and particularly for her *Homage to Mahatmaji*, the last-named having been presented personally to Mahatma Gandhi. Her *Prayer* dedicated to the blind is also considered to be very beautiful.

Naja D. Tata is a teacher and gifted exponent of the mandoline. Korshad Madan is a gifted violinist, having taken her higher studies in London. After giving a series of successful recitals in Wigmore Hall in England, she is teaching in the Calcutta School of Music. Mani Madan has gained a name as a talented pianist and, like her sister Korshad, is a teacher in the Calcutta School of Music.

In the field of singing, few Indian women have achieved international standard, though Priya Chatterjee has sung in opera in Milan, and Krishna Bhan's pure soprano voice won an international prize for singing in Madrid. In addition, the latter has fulfilled contracts in Germany, singing flawlessly in five European languages.

Roshan Pandole is a gifted young singer possessing an exceptionally pure and melodious voice. Her rendering of the leading soprano part in Handel's *Messiah*, particularly the selection *Angels Bright and Fair*, Edward German's *Love* and selections from Grieg have won her a special place in the hearts of western music lovers. She is a popular vocalist in most of the classical concerts in Bombay and in the classical music programmes on the radio.

A number of younger musicians are continuing to contribute to the general interest in western music in India. Among them may be mentioned Siloo Panthaki and Myra Menzies, who are violinists, and Zenobia Vakil, who is a gifted pianist. Her Mozart concerts in Vienna and her recent debut in Bombay have established her as a rising young musician.

Apart from these performers and singers in western music, several associations are helping to further this art in the country. In some of these, women have been taking a leading part. The All India Women Artists' Associations of Delhi and Bombay are two of them. The association in Bombay is doing laudable work in giving a helping hand to those artists who are unable to gain recognition owing to financial difficulties. It has sponsored both art exhibitions and concerts. Among the latter may be mentioned a concert of western music where a large number of players were amateurs and professional women musicians.

The Time and Talents Club of Bombay is also doing splendid work. It has been responsible for introducing many world-famous musicians to Bombay audiences and thus enabled them to enjoy western music at its best. The Delhi Music Society sponsors concerts of leading artists from all over the world from Menuhin to Moiesovitch. Its President is Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. The Delhi Choral Society, started this year, also has a woman President. Women critics too are playing their part in encouraging good western music and a wider taste for it in India. Two of these are Muriel Wasi and Margaret Chatterjee who regularly contribute articles to some of the leading Indian newspapers on the subject.

In a brief survey such as this, it has not been possible to include all the names of women who have brought distinction to our creative and fine arts. We pay homage to all our sisters, past and present, who have been creators and patronesses of the arts in their many forms—lyrics, music, painting, architecture, dance, drama and films. Since Independence, these arts have come into their own with renewed vigour and national pride. Every city of India has innumerable amateur dance performances and musical concerts by women, as well as plays in all languages by mixed casts. Charity performances of well-known artists are also invariably organized by women's committees. One interesting function organized by women's dance and drama groups in Delhi was the *Diwali Mela* (Festival of Lights) recreated in a miniature village setting for the delegates of the UNESCO Conference in 1956. A highly successful exhibition of paintings by women artists was also held in New Delhi in 1956.

Cultural delegations comprising dancers, musicians, singers and stage and film artistes, which have been invited by foreign countries in both the East and the West, have included a large number of women. They have not only won appreciation but have helped create a better understanding of our arts. In the surging art movements in our country there is evidence that women will continue to enrich our cultural heritage with valuable contributions in every branch of the arts, just as their sisters have done from time immemorial.

WOMEN WRITERS

Lila Ray

[Fourteen languages are listed in the Indian Constitution. They are: Assamese, Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Gujerati, Marathi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and Urdu. There are, besides, other languages, like Rajasthani and Maithili, which not only have an independent existence but a literature of their own. They are not, however, considered important enough to be on the list. Neither is English. The use of English will continue till 1965 as a matter of convenience. By the end of that period Hindi is expected to have taken its place, while English will remain the language for international purposes.

The languages spoken in Northern India belong to the Indo-Aryan family, with the exception of Urdu. The oldest documents of Indo-Aryan origin are in Sanskrit. Sanskrit was originally preserved as a religious language, though later it came to be used for secular purposes also. It is still cultivated as a literary language. Sanskrit has influenced the development of the spoken languages and has, in turn, been influenced by them. The language of the Vedic texts shows a certain mixture but is in the main founded upon the dialects of North-West India. Later the influence of the dialects of the North-East become evident.

Pali and Prakrit were spoken dialects which came to be used as religious languages. The modern Indo-Aryan languages are derived from these. The old Vedic language can, for instance, be traced through Prakrit and Saurasena Apabramsa to modern Gujerati, an unbroken development of nearly 4,000 years with not a link in the chain missing.

Sauraseni was one of the two chief Prakrits spoken in the Ganga and Jamuna valleys in the early centuries of the Christian era. The languages of the Western group developed out of it. The languages of the Eastern group developed out of Magadhi Prakrit. Of these, Bengali is the most important.

A third Prakrit, the most important literary one, is Maharashtri Apabramsa. Marathi is the only modern language derived from it and this occupies, in consequence, a somewhat independent position.

Of the four principal languages of the South, all of which are classified as Dravidian, Telugu occupies the most independent position. It is the only descendent of the Andhra dialect of Old Dravidian.

Tamil was the first to develop a literature of its own. It has preserved most traces of the original form of speech from which the Dravidian dialects derive. No other Dravidian language has developed the common Dravidian principles with greater consistency.

Tamil and Malayalam are sister dialects of the same language. Early Malayalam was much influenced by Tamil but the modern language has developed a rich literature of its own.

Kannada is also closely related to Tamil. The two together form one of the principal groups of the Dravidian family. The first literary work in Kannada was much influenced by Sanskrit.

Urdu, though akin to Hindi in many respects, takes most of its vocabulary from Persian and Arabic. It possesses a large and very rich literature.]

THE VEDAS

> "I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him a sage, a rishi, a Brahman!"

Vac, the composer of this line, was the daughter of a *rishi*, Ambhirna. She is the first of a long line of *brahmavadinis* whose writings have been incorporated in the *Vedas* and *Puranas*, the same sacred books their unfortunate modern sisters were, until recently, forbidden to read because of their sex. Vac, in this *Hymn to Speech*, assumes the role of its presiding deity, a goddess. The World is Woman and this woman says:

> "I am the queen, the gatherer-up of treasures,
> Most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship."

And she goes on :

> "I, verily, myself announce and utter the word that men and gods alike shall welcome.........
> Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them—
> Each man who sees, breathes, hears the word outspoken......
> Hear, one and all, the Truth as I declare it......
> I hold together all existence......."

This hymn is among the sacred verses murmured over a child before giving it the breast, at its first use of speech and also

as part of the initiation ceremony of boys, at which they receive the sacred thread. It is found in the *Rigveda*, earliest of the *Vedas*.

Among the Aryans, women were well-educated. The persistent questioning of a woman brought forth the finest definition of the Supreme Reality in the *Upanishads*. Yajnavalkya, who gave it, was so hard pressed by Gargi afterwards that in the end he was forced to exclaim: "O Gargi, do not ask too much lest thy head fall off!"

Twice at least in India's history were the greatest men of the time defeated in debate by women. When, in the 8th Century, Mandana Misra was engaged in a debate with Sankaracharya, the most impartial referee they could find was Mandana Misra's wife, Ubhayabharati. Misra lost the debate but his wife took it up and forced Sankaracharya to plead for time !

Lopamudra, Ghosa, Apala, Romasa, Surya, Savitri, Juhu, Yami, Visvavara, Sachi and Ratri are some of the other famous women whose verses are in the *Rigveda*. The great Maitreyi is remembered for her conversation. She did not write. It is not inappropriate that the first Hymn to Faith should be written by a woman, Sraddha Kamayani. She says :

> Faith in the early morning, Faith at noonday will we invoke;
> Faith at the setting of the sun; O Faith, endow us with belief!"

The language of all the e women was Vedic Sanskrit.

THE BUDDHISTS

No less remarkable were the Buddhist nuns, called *theris*, whose songs, known as *gathas*, are included in the Buddhist canon. Seventy-three women record their lives. The longest poem was composed by Sumedha, daughter of King Koncha of Mantavatir. She refused a kingdom to become a nun. Isidasi was the only child of wealthy parents. Three times she was given in marriage and thrice deserted. Uppalavanha's husband deserted her after the birth of a daughter.

Her great beauty later tempted her son-in-law unwrittingly to marry her. When Uppalavanna discovered what had happened she renounced the world. Subha Jivakambavanika, trapped in an orchard by a man who sought to seduce her by praising her beautiful eyes, plucked one of them out and handed it to him. It is said the Buddha restored her sight. Most remarkable of all was Bhadda Kundalakesa, the curly-haired. In love with a handsome, well-born rascal condemned to death for robbery, she persuaded her father to save his life and married him. Not long after he plotted to rob and murder her. She carried out the death sentence herself, pushing him over a cliff, abandoned her jewels and joined the holy order. These *theris* wrote in Pali.

JAINS AND OTHERS

Bhadda was a Jain nun at first and a Jain nun was the earliest Kannada poetess. Kanti lived at the court of Ballal Raja at Dorasamudra in he 12th century. Akka Devi, also a nun, lived about the same time.

She was a disciple of Basava. Of her it is said that the lord of her city wished to marry her but he preferred the unfettered life of an ascetic. Akka Devi's Kannada aphorisms are shrewd and biting. "Can a person who buys a house in a market-place be disturbed by noise"? she demands "or alarmed by the roar of the surf if he builds a house by the sea ? Can we let praise or blame of the world perturb us when we are born into the world?"

The dominant interest in all Indian literature was, from the beginning down to the modern period, religious. Religion afforded a narrow opening to women through which they could force their way out into freedom of expression. Woman as a divine singer has never lost her voice as an individual. She has addressed herself exclusively and safely to God, giving her personal emotions dignity and universal validity by identifying them with those of a god or goddess, mythological hero or heroine. An exception was Honnamma

a Sudra woman who was an attendant upon the queen in Chikku Deva Raja's court. She was called, from her occupation, *Sanchiya Honni* or Honni of the Betel Bag. She was a pupil of Singararya and wrote a book called *Hadibadaya Dharma* (the Duty of a Faithful Wife). Her language was Kannada.

The untouchable woman, Avvaiyar, known as The Venerable Matron, was also an exception. She was the sister of Tiruvalluvar, author of the *Kural*, the finest poetical composition in the whole of Tamil literature. In the 2nd century A.D. Avvai wrote two short moral poems, called the *Attisudi* and the *Konreivendan*, which are still read in Tamil schools.

DEVOTIONAL SECTS

A Tamil, Andal, was also the first of the great woman *bhakti* singers. She was a foundling, discovered as an infant in his flower garden by one of the Alvars, who brought her up as his daughter. The Alvar movement reached its height between the 7th and 9th centuries. Through it God first came to be worshipped as the irresistible lover, Krishna, with the personal devotion which was later to inspire Ramanuja and the northern *bhakti* sects.

The inspiration of Vaishnavism did not come to the North until the 13th and 14th centuries. The break with the Vedic period came much earlier and Buddhism went into decline, although Jainism retained its hold in certain areas for a while longer. Sanskrit was still written and is written even today. We have the brilliant work of Pandita Kshma Row, who died in 1954. She wrote more than a dozen long poems retelling, in modern Sanskrit, the lives of Tukaram, Ramdasa and Jnanesvara. She also composed passionate national songs. Her stories all have a moral and she was adept in dealing with pathetic situations.

The work of the few women whose names have come down to us as writers of both Prakrit and Sanskrit—Vijjaka, Vikatanitamba and Jayanti Devi—was devotional. Devotional also

were the songs of the Marathi saint, Muktibai, in the 13th century. "He is a saint who knows how to bow to the world's abuse"! she cries, defining in a line the discipline of the *bhaktis*. And for Janabai, who followed her in the 14th century, the humble grindstone was symbolic. She sings, again in Marathi :

"All outward form to dust is ground,
All eyes can see,
For 'tis the Lord himself I've found,
Who grinds for me!"

In Orissa one of the three most intimate companions of Chaitanya Dev was an Oriya poetess, Madhabi Dasi. These three are always referred to as the two-and-a-half, the half being Madhabi. She was a woman! Many of her verses have been incorporated in the Vaishnava canon. She wrote in Brajabuli.

The great and impassioned Mirabai is claimed by both Gujerati and Hindi. Her influence on both has been profound. Mira was born in Merta about the end of the 15th century. Her grandfather was the founder of modern Jaipur. She was married to the son of Rana Sanga of Chitor. Her husband died when Mira was in her twenties and his cousin, who came to the throne, disapproved of her piety. Persistent persecution drove her to seek safety with her father. But her father was dead, having been killed in the same battle in which her father-in-law lost his life. So Mira left Rajputana and went to live in Brindaban. Her songs are too well-known to need quotation here. She has had many imitators. Diwalibai, Radhabai, Krishnabai and Gauribai, all Gujeratis, wrote in her tradition.

A DIFFERENT TRADITION

In a different tradition is Kumari Molla, a potter woman who, in the early 16th century, wrote a version of the *Ramayana* in Telugu which is still a standard work. Disputed points of prosody and syntax are settled by reference to her. The

The renowned Hindi poetess, Mahadevi Varma reciting at a Kavi Sammelan, a gathering of poets

(Below): An editor, and a writer—Frene Talyarkhan, Editor of Trend, and Santha Rama Rau

A scene from the opera "Heer Ranjha"

bhakti poets, from Andal to Mirabai were, almost without exception, unconscious artists who composed while under divine inspiration. This was not the case with Molla. She was a fully conscious, scholarly artist. Her rank as one of the greatest Telugu writers, man or woman, is undisputed.

Scholarly also was Madhurabani, who was the court *pandit* of Raja Raghunath of Tanjore in the 16th century. She composed a version of the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* of Chandravati, a Bengali poetess who was writing about the same time, was never finished though it is still widely known in parts of East Bengal. Chandravati was the only child of a famous poet of the time, Dwija Bangsidas of Kishoregunj. She loved Jayananda, a boy who was her companion in her studies with her father. They composed many verses together. But on the eve of their marriage he suddenly left her, accepting Islam for the sake of a Muslim girl. Chandravati's father built a small temple to Siva in a secluded spot and there she lived as priestess, writing her *Ramayana* at her leisure. Jayananda, repentant, came back but she refused to see him. Finding the door of the temple closed he scribbled a few lines of poetry on a panel of it and drowned himself. Chandravati wrote no more.

The oldest work in the Kashmiri language that has survived is the *Lalla-vakyani*, a collection of verses on Saiva philosophy by a woman named Lalla or Lalleswari. She is known in Kashmir as "Grannie Lalla" and no poet is more frequently quoted, even today. She was a mystic, and many of her wise words have become proverbs for she had great pithiness of expression.

Habba Khatun's exquisite lyrics are also still popular in Kashmir. She was the queen of Yusuf Shah Chak, the last King of Kashmir before the invasion of the Moghuls. Yusuf is said to have fallen in love with her when he heard her singing in the fields of saffron When he became king he married her and she took her natural place as the patron of a court famous for the arts. Every Kashmiri child knows the story of her life as a village girl, her struggle to obtain a divorce from the man to whom her parents had married her, her life as queen,

as a fighter for the freedom of the beautiful valley and her final renunciation on the imprisonment and death of her beloved king. It is interesting to note that in Kashmiri poetry it is the woman who languishes for the Beloved, while in Urdu literature and the literature of other Islamic cultures it is the lover who wastes with longing for "the lady behind the lattice".

Arnimal, an 18th century *panditani* deserted by her husband, a Persian scholar, weeps:

> "My complexion, which was like July jessamine
> Has assumed the pallor of a yellow, faded rose.
> O when will he come and let me have
> A look at his beloved face!"

Her lyrics are still sung in Kashmir.

Muddupalani (c. 1750) is a famous name in Telugu. She was attached to the court of Pratapsinha of Tanjore and wrote *Radhika Santwanam.* With her we are brought to the threshold of the modern period. The condition of women was at its worst and it is a strange fact that, though courtesans had a virtual monopoly of education, few achieved literary fame. Muddupalani was one. Pravin Ray Raturi was another. Her numerous short poems in Hindi have a high reputation. She was the beloved of the poet Keshav Das (1555-1617).

The anonymity of folk literature has always afforded women a vicarious outlet for their feelings. Many are the songs and rhymes current in the countryside which are the compositions of women and are used by them to convey their reactions to situations.

> "You forget me, Mother, and all I have to put up with from my crazy husband!"

Uma explains to her parent in an anonymous *agamoni* song from Bengal why she cannot come home for the annual visit.

She goes on to say :

> "Bhola laughs and cries all the time.
> He does not know anybody but me.
> I must stay near him.
> I cannot keep from worrying.
> There is nothing left of me.
> Worry has worn me out.
> What floods of tears I shed, Mother !"

And Menaka sends for her daughter.

"Go, Giri, go and bring her !
Stricken with grief is my Uma !
My son-in-law is a beggar and drugs himself with hemp !
I hear he has sold all Uma's clothes."

Such songs abound in Bengal villages. Many are associated with marriage and its subsidiary ceremonies. From Assam comes a folk song describing delightfully the state of a young girl in love :

"Boatmen's oars move in the river;
The pestle pounds the grain;
My heart aches in passion.
Since I was born a woman....
My hands quiver, the shuttle drops,
Though I sit beside my loom."

From the Punjab come the poignant songs of soldiers' wives.

"A piece of my heart I use as paper"

one sings as she sits down to write to her absent husband;

"Kajal from my eyes I use as ink".

Mr. C. F. Usborn has translated the famous Bangle Song. Let me quote the first and last verses :

"Tell me, bangles, my pretty ones, say,
Why do you tinkle so gaily ?
For your master, my loved one, is far far away,
And its him you remind me of daily;
All the day, all the night I am alone
The god shave no pity, their hearts are of stone....

Wars should be fought by men without wives;
Bangles, ring softly and sadly,
For the dear one's absence rends and rives
The heart that loves him madly,
Life of me, love of me, live for my sake.
For the heart of your darling is ready to break."

With the revival of interest in folk literature at the present day a conscious effort is being made to write in this tradition. A very young woman writer in Orissa, Tulasi Das, is experimenting with it.

THE MODERN PERIOD

Not until the modern period have women been able to speak freely in their own voices, as women rather than devotees,

secularly. For the most part they were silent, a sad silence about which a young Assamese poetess, who died before she was 24, wrote a moving poem from which I wish to quote. For though the names I mention in this article are many, the centuries and the languages covered are also many. Jamuneswari Khataniyar writes :

> "....In silence my hopes rise and sink,
> In silence I find my heart's delight,
> In silence I walk through eternal night,
> In silence I bear my defeat and triumph,
> In silence I die and in silence am born."

The objection to a woman's learning to read was, until recent times, so deep-seated that it required the full strength of the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bengal to uproot it. A superstittion that book learning may be a curse to a woman still lingers; too much education is supposed to make a woman unfit for family life. Society in general at first accepted the educated girl reluctantly, but in urban areas she is now, as the professional woman and the working girl, fairly secure in her position. The Indian woman of culture, wedged between old and new forces, the conflict between which threatens to crush her, nonetheless lives with a strength of spirit and a courage which have won her a place in the front rank of the world's women.

Because Bengal was foremost in educating her women, their contribution to her modern literature has been rich and rewarding. No less than 28 poets alone are listed in an authoritative book published 25 years ago. Time has added many new names. Rich, too, is Telugu. Taking the beginning of the modern period as the early 19th century we are given no less than 107 names by U. L. Kanthamma in her book *Andhra Kavayitrulu*. U. L. Kanthamma is herself one of the most distinguished contemporary writers and a well-known social worker.

The three women who are recognized as inaugurators of the modern movement in Telugu are Visvasundaram, Saudamini or B. Rajyalakshmamma and Bangaramma. Their works were included in the first anthology of modern poetry, published in 1925. Visvasundaram was born in 1900 and is

still writing. Saudamini, born in 1904, was the wife of one of the most important modern Telugu poets, Basavaraju Appa Rao. He died young. Since his death Saudamini has lived at Saradaniketan. The outstanding characteristic of Bangaramma, who was born in 1900, is the simplicity of her diction. She writes idiomatic, very feminine, conversational Telugu with great charm. Her most famous poem is *The Frog's Wedding*, based on the popular belief that when frogs make merry the rains bring good crops.

NEW WOMEN WRITERS

Swaranakumari Devi, the elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore, was Bengal's first woman novelist. She was also an editor. In her we see, for the first time in Bengal, the capable type of modern woman who is now to be found everywhere in India. Both her daughters also distinguished themselves as writers and editors, as well as in the general social and political life of the time. The younger, Sarala, was particularly brilliant. The political awakening and the growing interest in social reform widened the field of experience upon which women writers could draw for material. Fired by the joy of their new mental freedom and the expanding scope of their physical activity they became ardent patriots, feminists, educationists, social workers, journalists, editors, novelists and short story writers.

The short story and the short novel seemed to be specially suited to the new need for creative expression which women felt. Every language in India today has distinguished writers in these forms. The names of a few are Ashapurna Devi and Ashalata Sinha, Bani Ray and Lila Majumdar in Bengali; Pitambari Devi, Basanta Kumari Patnayak, Sakuntala Devi and Saraswati Kanungo in Oriya; Snehalata Bhattacharyya and Chandraprabha Shaikia in Assamese; Satyavati Mallik, Homavati Devi, Krishna Sahita and Ushadevi Mitra in Hindi; Shanta Hosabins and Shanta Shelke in Marathi; Gouramma, Savitramma and Kalyamma in Kanarese; V. M. Kothanayagi

Ammal and Swarnambal Subramaniam Guhapriya in Tamil; Rashid Jehan and Ismat Chugtai in Urdu; Labhuben Mehta, Vidyabahen Ramanbhai Nilkantha, Kunanika Kapadia and Dhiruben Patel in Gujerati; Malati Chandur, Kommuri Padmavati Devi and Nandagiri Devi in Telugu; and Ambadi Ekkavamma, Ambadi Karthyayani Amma, T. C. Kalyani Amma, B. Kalyani Amma, P. R. Syamala, N. Saraswati, Thankamma Mallik, Lella Omcheri and, most outstanding, Lalithambika Antharjanam in Malayalam. The name of Lady Vidwan Muthukulam Parvathy Amma is also well-known in Malayalam, both for her poetry and her short stories.

A note of urgency and exhortation has entered into the work of these modern women. Their outlook is robust, their efforts inspired and sustained by the knowledge that the conditions in which they themselves and their countrywomen have to live can be, and are improving. On the whole the voices of these women, if generalization is at all possible or permissible, are full of faith, hope and striving and the joyousness of living. They are sometimes humorous and always free from the melancholy which has haunted the poets.

Shanta and Sita Devi, the two daughters of Ramananda Chatterjee, founder-editor of *The Modern Review*, were probably the first in Bengal to portray the college-educated girl and her difficulties in a conservative society. The recurring theme in the stories of Nirupama Devi, famous for her novel, *Didi*, is the sacrifice by one woman of her personal happiness for the sake of another.

Bibhabari Sirurkar wrote stories against the background of the woman's movement 20 years ago in Marathi. Her first novel, *Bali*, takes as its subject the life of one of the aboriginal tribes. She is a realist and a humanist.

Kusumavati Deshpande, critic and short-story writer, is the first Marathi woman to become a professor. She joined her post in Nagpur in 1951.

Lilavati Munshi is a well-known writer of Gujerati literature. She is editor, playwright and story-writer, a gifted and independent woman of personality.

THE POETIC TRADITION

The poetic tradition in India is overwhelmingly strong and poets will probably be in a majority for a long time to come. The tradition of erotic mysticism still inspires devotional poetry of fine quality. There is, for instance, the delicate verse of Nalinbala Devi and Dharmeshwari Devi of Assam. Utter and complete is their self-surrender. Dharmeshwari Devi is blind and dictates her poems. A mystic too is the great Mahadevi Verma herself, a member of the Chhayavad group of Hindi writers, one of the three best poets now writing in that language.

Kuntala Kumari Sabat was the most popular poet in Orissa after 1920. She also wrote prose and her *Raghu Arakkhi*, written in 1926, was her first novel. Born in a Christian family in 1900, she was brought up in Burma and trained as a doctor. One of her book was prescribed because of its ardent patriotism. Her activities were many-sided. She died in 1938.

Romantic patriotism also fired the work of Subhadra Chouhan, who was killed in a motor car accident some years ago. Her famous poem, *The Rani of Jhansi*, is one of the most powerful expressions of this mood in Hindi. She has the unique distinction of having a statue erected to her memory.

Women's voices as poets are, for the most part, mournful and low. Feminine experience, is inevitably, limited but profound. Women make up in depth and intensity and sweetness what they lack in breadth. There is much delicacy of feeling, nuance, tenderness but little humour. A quiet resignation and assurance mark the work of many. Nature and mood dominate. Common themes are grief and longing, pain and frustration.

Curious in this connection is the work of Radharani Devi of Bengal, the best of contemporary women poets. For years she wrote in two completely separated roles. As the serious, grave, indignant and rather humourless feminist, she signed her won name. But when she wrote light witty, gay verse with a wistful, half-revealed, half-concealed undertone of sorrow, she was Aparajita Devi. Few guessed the identity of the two until she herself revealed it and produced proof.

Amrita Pritam, a young Punjabi poet who began composing in her teens, has touched heights of poetic achievement in mourning the fate of divided Punjab. She has wrung poetry from her personal experience of the partition and the agony it brought. Her most famous poem is addressed to Waris Shah, composer of the Punjabi epic *Heer*.

Childhood and motherhood as themes are perennial favourites with woman poets. Balamani Nair, foremost of living woman poets in Malayalam, describes a young mother thus in her famous poem of that name. She writes:

> "She stood before her lord with her first-born in her arms as she had stood before him on her wedding day with her bridal garland in her hands and a thrill in her heart;
>
> "She no longer saw in him only a lover; now he was a guardian angel who lit her path to a higher world."

The first cry of the beloved child was to them :

> "A mantra that purified their love...."

As the boy grows up he asks :

> "When shall I be as big as mother ?"

And she thinks :

> "What free soul is there that does not long to be in bondage ?"

And when the boy interrupts her meditation thus :

> "When the dawn comes and scatters light around
> Why do you close your eyes and sit in darkness?"

She answers with glad affirmation :

> "Yes. It would be a pity if mother closed the door against this golden dawn !"

Much earlier, Kamini Ray, the greatest of the early modern women poets of Bengal, had addressed her dead son on his 16th birthday in these words :

> "I did not trouble God, saying,
> 'You gave and took away !' The few days
> You lived were unsurpassed in good fortune.
> You were and you are : every day and always
> I shall have you, my son...."

WRITERS OF ENGLISH

English is being written by more and more Indian women. No survey of their work would be complete without reference

to the rhapsodic singing of Sarojini Naidu and that of Toru Dutta, her young predecessor. Toru Dutta was born in 1856 in a Bengali Christian family. At the age of 13 she went abroad with her parents and lived for four years in England and France. In England she attended lectures at Cambridge, and in France studied at a pensionnat in Nice. In 1876 she published *A sheaf Gleaned From French Fields* and later a second book, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindusthan*, appeared. Both of them are verse. She also wrote a novel in French. She died in 1877 at the age of 21. The influence of her years abroad gave her an open and questioning mind. The ballad *The Royal Ascetic and the Hind* closes with these lines :

> "Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
> Not in a place elected for its peace,
> But in the heat and bustle of the world,
> 'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
> Must he still labour with a living soul
> Who strives to enter through the narrow gate."

Sarojini Naidu was also a Bengali. She was born in Hyderabad in 1879 and died in 1949. She published only three slim volumes of verse for she put aside her writing after Jallianwala Bagh and dedicated herself to the cause of the country's liberation. The extraordinary musical quality of her verse won her the title of the "Nightingale of India". Her imagery is picturesque and lavish. In her complete freedom from sectarian feeling she finds room in her heart for all people and all creeds. She is in the core of Indian tradition in these verses from a Rajput love song :

> "O love ! were you the scented fan that lies upon my pillow,
> A sandal lute, or silver lamp that burns before my shrine,
> Why should I fear the jealous dawn that spreads with cruel laughter,
> Sad veils of separation between your face and mine?
> Haste, O wild-bee hours, to the gardens of the sunset !
> Fly, wild-parrot day, to the orchards of the west !
> Come, O tender night, with your sweet, consoling darkness,
> And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast !"

Bharati Sarabhai is an outstanding contemporary poet. The old woman in her long poem, *The Well of the People*, is symbolic of India's poverty and her power of sacrifice. In a final act

of self-denial she builds a well with her life savings. She had dreamt of going on a pilgrimage to Banaras, but she says:

> "I could not go—you ask, have I enough ?
> Ask, ask, for all I have is not enough."

The poet says :

> "Not even for life's money would anyone take her.
> She wept, she begged, she promised. All her love,
> Was it not enough ? No, it was not enough.
> At the last it was not enough."

And the old woman's face, a "dim, livid, drowsy herb" was lifted to a startling sun.

A well-known writer of prose is Santha Rama Rau, whose novels and short stories command wide attention. The latest Indian woman to make her mark in English is Kamala Markandaya, whose novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, has been well-received abroad. Her subject also is a woman of the people.

Mahadevi Verma speaks for all the women of India in the following beautiful poem, which I have translated from Hindi. As it is short, I give it in full. She says:

> "Beloved ! I too am an enigma.
> Of all the sweetness, of all the smiles,
> Of all the enchantment of your eyes,
> Of all the weeping, of all the boredom,
> Of all the poison in the pulsing of the world
> I have partaken, an addict,
> Ever thirsty for sorrow.
> And I also disport myself in the river of joy !
> From every part of me simultaneously flow
> Fire that burns and streams that cool.
> Attraction and aversion, seeking each other,
> Maintain the flow of my breath.
> Beloved ! My upbringing
> Has been circumscribed
> Yet I play with the unconfined !"

WOMEN IN SPORT

Amita Malik

Although contemporary women's sport in India cannot entirely claim to be of world class, sport, by itself, is by no means something new or strange to the country.

There are innumerable instances in Indian mythology of women who excelled at games of skill. It was the famous Indian heroine, Shakuntala, who taught archery to her son, the son of the equally famous hero Dushyanta.

Indian history similarly provides stirring examples of women of martial race fighting side by side with their men in times of emergency, such as invasion. Tales of Rajput and Maharashtrian chivalry suggest that the women of those races were skilled in riding and the chase. Miniature paintings of the Moghul period show women playing polo, and there are charming anecdotes which have been handed down from generation to generation. Chess is still another courtly game where women proved their prowess in olden times.

If we stretch the word sport to that allied art, dancing, we again find that Indian women have distinguished themselves for centuries at this most graceful and, in the case of classical dancing, exacting of arts. The frescoes of Ajanta depict women in what corresponds closely to *Bharata Natyam* dress. The enchanting *Kathak* ballerina's skirt, displayed at a pageant of ancient Indian costumes held to coincide with the UNESCO session in Delhi (1956), also revived memories of the high level of proficiency attained by court dancers of the Moghul period. Besides, from time immemorial, the folk dances of India have featured women dancers.

Less inhibited and shy than the city woman, the village maiden whole-heartedly took part in folk dancing, which was part of village life, to celebrate seasonal joys and domestic blessings and helped to make village and family events a time for mass exuberance and community participation.

Social restrictions and urban taboos never applied to folk dancing and, as a result, this truly indigenous and highly popular folk art survived in its purest form in thousands of Indian villages and remained untouched by foreign invasion and occupation. Harvest and other festivals saw women take an equal part with men in the outpouring of their joy through centuries old folk dances. Indeed, one of the most colourful aspects of the annual celebration of Republic Day in New Delhi is the Folk Dance Festival. Authentic folk dancers from every corner of India, including remote tribal areas, descend in all their traditional splendour on the historic city of Delhi.

Coming to modern times, it must be admitted that Indian women were not seriously interested in sport until the early 1900's. Club life, which was introduced into India by the British, did, however, encourage women of the leisured, official class to indulge in a little ladylike exercise to kill their long hours of leisure. But the average Indian woman remained unaffected by this mild form of sporting activity. But this much can be said to the credit of club life, it did stimulate sufficient interest in sport on the part of mothers to make them agree to let their daughters partricipate in games and physical exercise when these were introduced as part of the curriculum in modern, progressive schools. Besides, parents noticed that the health of their daughters as well as their qualities of leadership and poise increased as a result. No longer was sport considered immodest or an out-door life bad for the complexion.

Because of this traditional association of Indian women with folk and classical dancing, and also because of the nucleus of sporting activity provided by club life, a certain amount of seriousness inevitably crept into women's sports. It first became noticeable in the early 1930's. Already, women pioneers had started blazing a trail. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Health Minister in India's first Cabinet, set an example for North Indian women by taking to competitive tennis. In Western India, a brave woman, who had already poached into men's preserves and established renown as a Sanskrit scholar, also started winning tournaments. Pandita Kshma Row, who

had started serious tennis in the 1920's, set the same example in Western India as the Rajkumari did in the North.

RAJKUMARI COACHING SCHEME

It is but fitting that Rajkumari Amrit Kaur should have sponsored the Rajkumari Coaching Scheme. This is an all-India drive to discover sporting talent all over the country and to train young people with the assistance of distinguished international and national experts. It is significant that this scheme accords as much attention to women as it does to men.

The Constitution of India concedes full equality between the sexes. Side by side with this, social legsilation has ensured woman various marriage and property rights which have revolutionalized her place in public and private life. That this equal status also applies to sporting activities is evident from the fact that the National Plan of Physical Education and Recreation, evolved by India's Minister of Education, devotes as much method and planning to physical education and recreation in educational institutions for girls as in those for boys. This is a scheme which applies to college physical education and recreation as well. It is significant that among the activities recommended for women are yogic exercises, that most famous of Indian systems for physical well-being and mental prowess. Similarly, women are given a chance, whenever possible, to go abroad to participate in international sports events.

Indeed, Indian women have reached a stage where they are participating regularly in national and international sports meets and are gaining valuable experience. While more popular games such as hockey, basketball, tennis, swimming, table-tennis, badminton, athletics and volleyball are attracting steady adherents, Indian women have also shown that they are not averse to the unusual : a women's soccer team toured India some time ago, playing exhibition matches. Besides, one of the most popular methods of raising money for deserving charities is to field a team of Indian film actresses in light-hearted cricket matches—a method that never fails !

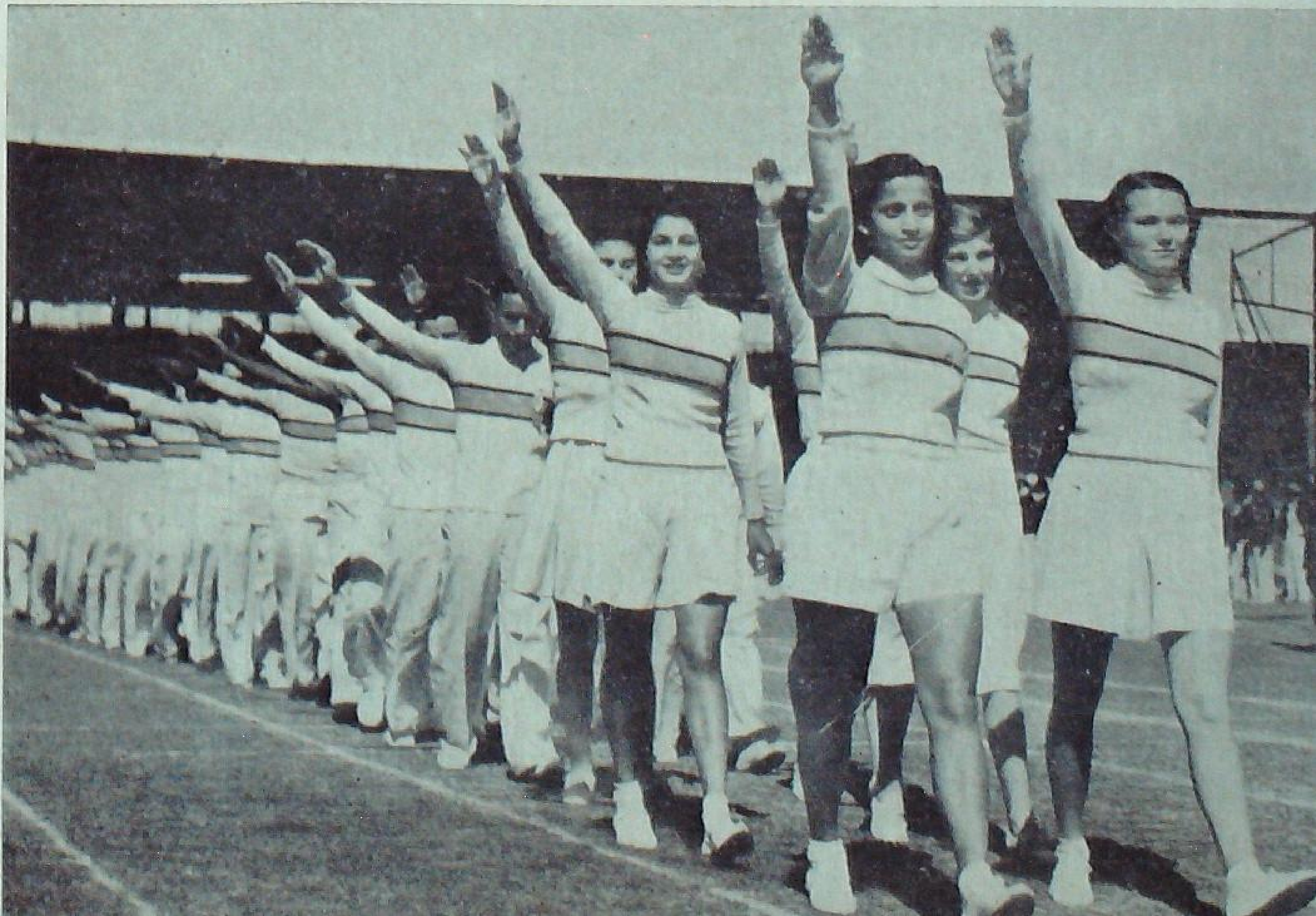
India also has a few women rifle champions. Sabita Chatterji and Geeta Roy of Bengal are well known in shooting circles. In this sphere India has gradually started sending women contestants abroad, and the valuable experience thus gained in international contests is sure to attract more women to this most jealously guarded of male preserves.

On a more serious plane, India can boast of that most unique of female rarities—a woman commercial pilot. The story of Prema Mathur is the kind of saga heard and admired all over the world. It seems only the other day that the Indian woman aviation pioneer, Urmila Parikh, proudly won her "A" licence. Prema Mathur, however, had bigger ambitions. Since the day a foreign test pilot took her up in a fighter plane as a pig-tailed girl, her one ambition in life was to become a commercial pilot. Even when her brother, a flying instructor, was killed in a tragic flying accident in Kanpur, Miss Mathur did not swerve from her resolve.

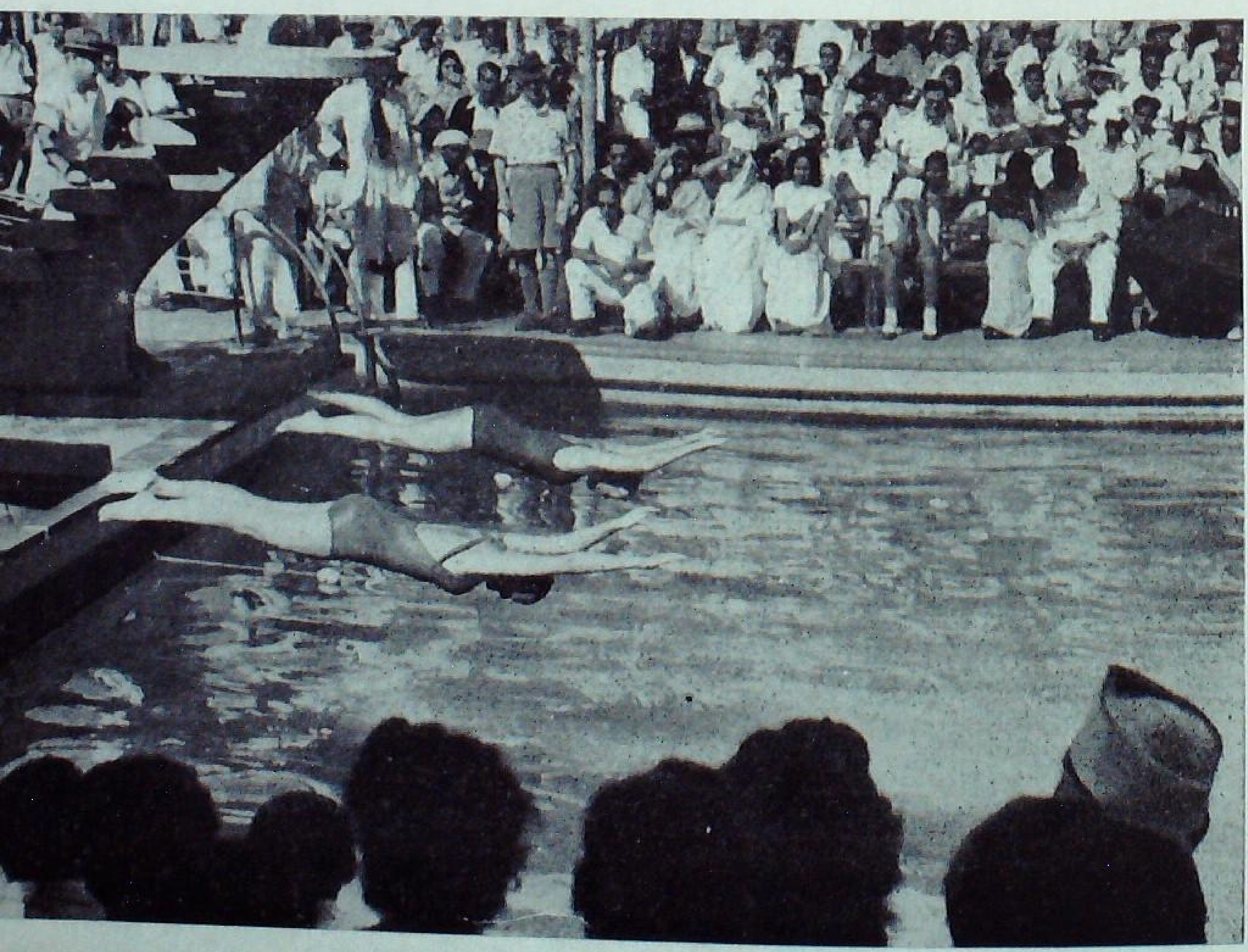
There is no commercial airline in the world which employs women pilots. Miss Mathur, in her long struggle for recognition, enquired from every country in the world. But while women had been allowed in the Air Force, women pilots in commercial airlines were still unheard of. So Miss Mathur faced the prospect of unemployment after the expensive training to obtain a "B" (Commercial) Licence. However, fortune has smiled on her. To keep her licence Miss Mathur has to put in a certain number of flying hours every season. The kind of plane she is supposed to fly is only available with the airlines. Because of this wonderful outlet, Miss Mathur has flown the Indian night air mail and the Kashmir flight over the Banihal Pass. As co-pilot of passenger planes, she has climbed on the wings, faced emergencies without a quaver and been accorded the admiration and respect she deserves from her men colleagues. In the international sphere, she has won an American trophy given to the best woman pilot of the year. Miss Mathur recently added to her laurels the unique distinction of flying the Home Minister of India on election campaigns. She now earns her living by piloting the private Dakota of an Indian industrial magnate. It is typical that she first came into

A physical training display of the Arya Kanya Gurukul Vidyalaya, Porbunder

Girl athletes of the Bombay contingent leading the march-past in the olympics in Bombay



Swimming champion Dolly Nazir receiving an award



Women competitors in a swimming championship, Bombay

the limelight in India by winning an air race across the country where she had to compete with flyers of international renown, and this in her early twenties within a few months of obtaining her solo licence.

HOCKEY

Hockey, a field in which Indian men have remained world champions for years, has naturally attracted the gentler sex too. The Indian Women's Hockey Association is in its infancy but has already sent teams to the International Women's Hockey Championships in the U. K. in 1953-54 and Australia in 1956. National championships are also held, and while our women have not achieved anything spectacular yet, they have certainly gained valuable experience.

Athletics attracted Indian women even earlier. It was introduced on a competitive basis for women in the 1934 Olympics in Delhi. The Punjab, U.P. and Bengal, three States which still retain their reputation in sport, were the poineer participants. The Anglo-Indian community, which has always participated with zest in women's sport, contributed several famous early names to this sphere. Una Lyons, Mrs. Easdon, the Hayes sisters, the Misses Brown, Carr, Edwards and Gilbert have worthy successors now in Christine Brown, broad jump champion, and Violet Peters. Indian women first participated in international athletics at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952. A token team of two, Mary D'Souza (sprinter) and Nilima Ghose (80-metre hurdler) were inexperienced but eager contestants. That experience pays dividends was proved when India swept the boards at the second Asian Games in Manila, including a spectacular win in the 4,100 metres relay.

A promising young athlete, Mary Leela Rao, earned her place in the Indian Olympic team for Melbourne in 1956. Miss Rao was the proud leader of the Indian march-past at the Games.

One of the most popular games among Indian girls is table-tennis. India first hit the world headlines when a

young, pig-tailed girl called Sayeeda Sultana extended the world champion, Angelica Rozeanu, at the world championships in Vienna. India's table-tennis strength has since been reinforced by players like Meena Parande, Rachel John and Gool Nasikwala. Miss Nasikwala won the triple crown in the first Asian Championships in Singapore in 1952. The former world champion, Victor Barna, has been training promising players under the Rajkumari Coaching Scheme.

Badminton is another very popular game. Here again, India made a sensational international debut when Tara Deodhar, daughter of the famous cricketer, won the U.S. Women's title while studying in the U.S.A. about 10 years ago. Together with her sisters, Sundar and Sumer, Tara was soon joined by Mumtaz Chinoy (now Smt. Lotwala) and Sashi Bhat. The last named is the reigning champion. She and her team-mates, Mumtaz Lotwala, Prem Prasher, S. Kapadia and S. Athavale, beat the Malayans in the Asian zone of the Uber Cup early in 1957.

Tennis, another popular women's game, has had its followers for many years. The 1930's recall memories of a dashing young girl from Kharagpur, Jenny Sandison (later to become Mrs. Boland). Leela Row, daughter of Pandita Kshama Row, very aptly followed in her mothers' footsteps. Starting her career in Europe (where she also distinguished herself in and after school in other games too) Miss Row won every title worth the name in India, and her encounters with Mrs. Boland used to be looked forward to by their fans. Other names in Indian tennis are Khanum Haji (now Mrs. Singh), Urmila Thapar and the veteran, Laura Woodbridge. Rita Davar, the present champion, now regularly appears at Wimbledon. Girls are nevertheless handicapped as most parents cannot contemplate their daughters devoting their time to championship tennis.

Swimming, that most graceful if strenuous of sports, has also produced its India star. The unchallenged Indian queen of this sport in Dolly Nazir of Bombay, who has won every major swimming title in India and has not yet faced

serious opposition. Miss Nazir, not content with short-distance swimming, recently performed the marathon feat of swimming from a long-distance point in the Arabain Sea to the Gateway of India in Bombay.

VOLLEYBALL

Volleyball for women first came into vogue in U.P., where the U.P. Girls' Volleyball Club started the game under international rules in 1940. The Bharatiya Nari Volleyball Sangh, a pioneer body, arranged for coaching for girls, held tournaments in the early 40's and saw its efforts crowned when it was able to send a team to compete in the women's world championships in Moscow in 1952. This team has since won the national cup three times and has encountered healthy rivalry from Delhi and the Punjab. Names like Meenkashi Chowdhury, Shukla Roy, Uma Mathur, Manmohini, Indramohini and Kusum Mehra are well known.

It will thus be seen that, while India's outstanding sportswomen can, for the present, mostly be counted on the fingers of one hand, their achievements are by no means negligible. The talent hunt is, however, on all over the country. Backed by sound coaching, steady if quiet progress is undoubtedly being made. It takes very long, as everyone knows, to produce world champions, but it will not surprise anyone if, in a matter of years, India produces world champions in women's sport. Her pioneers have shown the way.

TRIBAL WOMEN

Verrier Elwin

The most important thing about the tribal woman is that she is–a woman. I stress this because there is sometimes a tendency to regard the tribal people as though they were something altogether apart from ourselves, almost as if they were of a different species. It is important, therefore, to emphasize that the tribal woman is, in herself, exactly the same as any other woman, with the same passions, loves and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues.

Even her functions are often the same. A remarkable statement on the position of women in a semi-Hinduized tribal society was recorded from a Pardhan priest of Madhya Pradesh by Shamrao Hivale and reproduced in his excellent account of that tribe, *The Pardhans of the Upper Narbada Valley*.

"In the course of a single day, a woman appears in many different forms. When she comes out of the house early in the morning with an empty pot on her head, she is a sight of ill-omen. Anyone starting on a journey or going for a betrothal decides not to travel on that day if he sees her, for in this form her name is *Khaparadhari*, an evil spirit carrying a broken bit of earthenware. "But within a few minutes the woman returns with a pot full of water and now she is *Mata Kalsahin*, the best and most auspicious of goddesses. The Pardhan who sees her then is ready to worship her. He throws a pice into the pot and goes on his tour full of hope and with a singing heart.

"The woman reaches the house and begins to sweep the kitchen....Now she is the goddess *Bahiri-Batoran*, who removes cholera from the village. But when she comes out to sweep the courtyard and the lane is front of her house, she sinks into a common sweeper-woman. In a moment, however, she changes again, for she goes into the cow-shed and becomes *Mata Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth and good fortune.

"Now it is time to serve the family with food and again her nature changes and she becomes *Mata Anna-Kuari*, the goddess of grain.

"In the evening she has to light the lamps in the house and now she is *Mata Dia-Motin*, the goddess who shines like a pearl. This done, she feeds her child and gently fans him to sleep and as he does this she becomes *Mata Chawar-Motin*,"

This could have been written, with suitable variations, of peasant women all over the world.

A wanchoo bride from tribal country radiant in her wedding finery

A sturdy mother and child from the Assam Hills

A tribal woman from Orissa ginning cotton

Banjara women dancing in the village *maidan*

Where the tribal woman differs from her more sophisticated sisters is in the kind of life she lives, her position in society and the inevitable influence that this has had on the way she behaves.

HARD LIFE

The life of most of the tribal people in India is very hard. The majority of them live in mountainous and forest country. Until recently the normal amenities of modern life have been almost entirely denied them. There have been few hospitals, no midwives, no child-guidance or family planning clinics, no creches for a busy mother to leave her child. In most tribal societies, the women not only do the work of the home, they also do a great deal of the work in the fields. In a Naga village in Assam, for example, a woman's life was in the past unbelievably arduous. With most of the menfolk organized for war, there fell on her the heavy burden of work in the *jhums* (clearings) on the steep slopes of hills often a long distance from the home. Her life was shadowed by anxie y for her husband, sons and brothers and by fear for herself and children who might at any time be attacked by raiders in search of human heads. When she returned in the evening, she might have to climb down 500 to 1,000 feet to the nearest water-point, for most Naga villages are perched on the tops of hills. There was the food to cook, the rice-beer to brew, the grain to husk, the children to nurse and a husband to console and cheer. She was always busy, and when there was no work in the fields she busied herself with her loom, on which she wove beautiful and durable cloth.

In other frontier areas of Assam there was not the same danger from head-hunting, but in some parts the women were exposed to fear of kidnapping raids. They might be carried off into slavery: they were subjected to cruel punishments. The burden of fear has now been lifted by the advance of the administration, but the burden of arduous work remains.

It has been and it generally still is a hard life, but it is a full life and a happy one. There is the village community,

a living organism, and the home so dearly loved. There are the mountains and the rivers winding among them. There are the treasures of the wind and sky and sun. There is beauty on every side—and these people love beauty very much.

It is on the whole a free life. It is impossible, of course, to generalize about a kind of people who number more than 20 million, but generally speaking the tribal woman enjoys a high and honourable place in society and goes proudly free about the countryside. She can speak her mind and often has considerable influence on village affairs. The wives and daughters of the great Wancho and Konyak Chiefs, for example, have many privileges, not least that of performing the ceremonial tattoo after a successful raid or, today, some ritual substitute for it.

RIGHT OF DIVORCE

The tribal woman is not, generally, subjected to early child-bearing. She is married when she is mature, and if her marriage is a failure (which it seldom is) she has the right of divorce. The lamentable restrictions of widowhood do not await her. Should her husband die, she is allowed, even enjoined, to remarry; and in many tribes she may inherit property. In the matrilineal societies of the Khasi and Garo Hills, and in the South, she has indeed a dominant position both for property and family affairs.

This freedom is not absolute. There are taboos on women at certain times, and there are things that they must not do. During menstruation and pregnancy there are many rules, based on magical ideas, which severely restrict their movements. Some tribal communities have complicated systems of relationships which govern matrimonial alliances, and while some allow boys and girls to marry for love at their own choice, others insist on arranged marriages, which can be as unsatisfactory as in any other part of the world.

But by and large the tribal woman has a wide freedom, which she seldom abuses. She can go to a bazaar, even by

herself. She can visit her friends. She can dance and sing, especially before marriage, as she pleases. She can laugh and joke with men without reproach. Her freedom becomes naturally somewhat restricted after marriage, but even then she can be herself.

Along with her freedom and independence, another striking quality of the tribal woman is her courage. As I have said, she has a hard life to face. The very high rate of infant mortality means that she may see some of her babies die at once and other children grow thin and wretched until they suffer an early death. She feels the loss of her children just as much as any woman of the cities. She herself may have to face appalling pain and constant sickness. She may have to make long journeys over the most difficult mountains and through forests haunted by wild animals. In the days of inter-village wars she had to move about a countryside where at any moment she might be killed or kidnapped.

Yet these women faced all these difficulties and dangers, with little to help and support them, with the utmost courage. I remember a Gond woman, whose baby had been dragged into the jungle by a leopard, picking up an axe and attacking the ferocious animal single-handed, thereby saving the life of her child I have seen women stand up to the even more dreaded antagonist, the police official of pre-Independence days, and rout him with a mixture of wit and abuse. One of the bravest women I have known, who was also one of the most beautiful, was a Pardhan who showed her courage in another field. Her name was Satula and she was a leper. She was the youngest of three wives of a hideous old leper. She was of a beauty so exquisite that the whole of Pardhan manhood was at her feet. She could have left her husband and married a young and well-to-do youth at any moment and no one would have condemned her. Yet she stayed with the old man, tending him devotedly, bathing his sores, bearing his continual grumbling and abuse, without complaint without annoyance. When he died and set her free, she married a younger man with whom she had long been in love. But she was, as I have said, a leper and she herself died soon

afterwards, but before her terrible disease had made much inroad on her beauty.

The tribal woman is indeed in many ways the equal, if not the rival, of the tribal man.

But this equality is modified by a curious inconsistency. Writing of the Uraons of Bihar, Mr. W.G. Archer observes that in the social organization of this attractive and progressive tribe, " the principles of succession are male, the method of government is male, the salient offices are male. The men are by convention and tradition the social superiors of the women. But if this is the convention, it is only partly the fact. In Uraon villages, the actual relation is one of equality. It is as equals that the men and women dance, it is as equals that a wife and a husband order their family affairs and it is as equals that they work and live together. There is thus a stress between the formal structure of tribal life and the actual feelings and emotions which thrust upon it."

"LAND OF WOMEN"

This stress may be observed throughout tribal India, and some interesting techniques have been devised to resolve it. For example, the women of some tribes have created the mythological fantasy of the Land of Women, a happy country which does not include a single man among its inhabitants–it is ruled by women and only girl-children are allowed to live. The women there conceive when the wind blows them and, it is said, they manage their affairs with great success and in the greatest happiness. Should any man by chance be so unfortunate as to enter their territory the women make him prisoner, sometimes turning him into a goat or a cat, and he has to work for them as their slave.

This legend is very old and there have been many attempts to locate this remarkable country. In Central India it is supposed to be in Assam, in Assam it is believed to be somewhere in Tibet. But whatever its geographical location there can be little doubt that it exists in every feminine heart.

A similar means by which tribal women compensate for all the wrongs they suffer from men is the custom which was called in Madhya Pradesh the *Stiria-Raj*, the Regiment of Women. From time to time, at regular intervals a woman would have a number of dreams revealing that the normal course of society had been reversed and that women were now to rule. She would then one day, inspired by a force stronger than herself, get up in the morning and put on male attire. She would tie a turban round her head and take a sword in her hand. Thus attired, she would go out and call on the other women of her village to accompany her, They would dress and arm themselves in the same style and then would go in procession first round their own village and then to all the villages in the neighbourhood. This band of women had the right to beat any man they could capture and take away any property they fancied from their menfolk. A man who was captured had to buy his freedom by the gift of a chicken or a pig. It often happened that as the band of women went on their way they would excite the women of other places and a sort of chain-reaction would be started which might spread across hundreds of villages.

I have already quoted Mr. W. G. Archer on the psychological need which this fulfils. He goes on to describe the Women's Hunt among the Uraons and Mundas, which seems to have originated in a myth describing how a number of Uraon women dressed as men routed a Raja and his army which invaded their country.

> "The myth shows that although the men may rule, it is the women who are also men. In its reliance on the success of a simple trick, it expresses Uraon pleasure in native cleverness and under this typically Uraon cover it mildly 'pokes fund at male incompetence. The balance is therefore righted. The women are recognized to be the equals of the men.
>
> "The hunt, with its brusque reversal of roles, has the same effect. It demonstrates that the country is as much the women's as the men's. For a single exciting day it downs all masculine dominance. It gives the women a new boldness and, finally, through the element of transvesticism, it clinches the excitement with a slightly sexual tinge. The women in the act of becoming men feel themselves profoundly female. As a result of this expression in playful pantomime female resentment at male control is neutralized. The feelings which if permanently repressed might cause danger are dispersed. The women in the act of asserting their rights realize from their gawky actions that the claim is unreal; and in peals of laughter the stress is dissolved.
>
> "The importance of the women's hunt is that, through simple symbolism, the tribe keeps its balance."

Another technique whereby woman asserts her position in a number of tribes ranging from Orissa to the North-East Frontier Agency is the institution of the priestess. This exists in its most fully developed form among the Saoras of Orissa, where in every village will be found one or more women who are dedicated to the task of divination and the spiritual treatment of illness. Among the Saoras these women are known as *kuranbois* and they have a most important part to play in tribal society.

MARRIAGE WITH SPIRIT

A girl is initiated into her sacred duties by a series of dreams, in the course of which she believes that she is married to a tutelary spirit in the unseen world. This marriage does not usually bar her from marriage in this world, but it means a great deal to her and she believes that she can have spirit-children from her unseen but very real husband. Not only does he give her these children but he 'possesses' her from time to time and by his inspiration assists her in all the work she has to do. These *kuranbois* are in great demand by the sick and they go to them, sit by them and try to discover what evil spirit or ghost is causing the disease. Once they have discovered this, they suggest to the male priest the sacrifices that are required.

A similar institution exists among some Abor groups in the North-East Frontier Agency, and throughout tribal India certain women are capable of 'inspiration': they fall into a trance and prophesy.

Here in fact is a body of women dedicated to public service and fulfilling that dedication with grace and energy. Here are women, believed to be vitally in touch with supernatural forces, on whom one can rely, who respond to the needs of the sick and anxious with professional thoroughness and affectionate concern, for the priestess really does care about her patients and the happiness and well-being of the community.

The tribal priestess is indeed an impressive and honourable figure. She lives a dedicated life on the boundary between this life and the next. The mysterious other-world is more real to her than the coarse realities of earth. She establishes in the eyes of her fellows the priority of spiritual things. To the sick and lonely she is nurse and friend, guide and analyst. To those whose lives are broken by tragedy she is often an angel of strength and consolation.

There are many other topics which may be considered, for even one woman can provide a life-time of study for a man. But what I have written here will suffice to illustrate the important place which women hold in tribal society. Protected by their innocence and their fidelity they move freely about the hills. They have an important role in festivity and funeral; they can more than hold their own with their men; they are free and self-reliant, respected and loved by their menfolk and adored by their children. Their life is full, interesting and satisfied.

HANDICRAFTS

Pupul Jayakar

The woman in India has always been the focal point of ornament. To understand her role in the craft traditions of this country and to assess her position as producer, consumer and inspirer it is necessary to enquire into the nature of craft traditions and impulses and to seek answers in the roots of craft structure.

The word handicraft, as it is commonly understood in the West, denotes hand-produced art and craft objects–individual both in the source of production and in character–made in the home. It symbolizes a protest against mechanization and mass production and an attempt to restate the existence of the individual as a creative being.

This concept of handicrafts has little meaning in India. Here, the craft worker and craft organizations are based on an ancient yet living tradition. There is no conscious attempt at establishing a new art vision, nor is it an essay in individual expression and uniqueness. The probem is both economic and aesthetic. Economic, because of the extent of the problem and the necessity of finding employment for skilled artisans who are losing their traditional markets; and the aesthetic problem of a tradition that, faced with the tremendous challenges of machines and altered environment, has either to transform itself totally to meet and satisfy the new demand or disappear. Form, structure, colour, function, ideologies, reasons for existence–all the elements that go to make up traditional craft objects are facing a crisis and seek an answer.

Craft traditions go back to the first hesitant organizations of society. Food, shelter and clothing were the essentials, and he *silpas* or crafts that came into existence were the projections of these needs.

More than 2,500 years ago, Panini's definition of a *Janapada* society included within the *silpas* or crafts the barber, carpenter,

washerman, dyer, dancer, gardener, painter, potter, goatherd, florist, weaver, tailor, arrowmaker, etc.

The pattern that craft traditions were to take in India and which were to survive for 5,000 years were already established at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. Two main streams are visible–the one folk in concept, rooted in the earth, in custom and ritual: the formulations and expressions of a rural people, manifesting a deep understanding of the nature of mass and volume. Within this field the producer, within the tradition, dictated the form.

The other stream was intellectual at the base and was concerned with surface ornament and with catering to the demands of a sophisticated ruling class: a field where the producer was subordinate to the dictates of his patron.

The Indian craftsman traced his descent from the very source of the creative godhead, Vishvakarma, the architect of the Gods, who is described as "Lord of all arts, carpenter of the gods, fashioner of all ornaments, a great and universal god".

The strength of Indian craft organization lay in the dynamic structure of the craft guilds in the conservative pattern of Indian society and in the extremely limited sources of communication that existed, till recently, between one area and another.

From earliest times Indian craftsmen were organized into craft guilds. Membership at first was not restricted to any one caste but to those who followed one trade. In time, however, vocation became synonymous with caste and the hereditary basis of craft organizations became firmly established.

The child of the craftsman grew up in the atmosphere of the workshop. Exposed to the living tradition, he unconsciously grew familiar with the forms, symbols and techniques. Knowledge was communicated from father to son, from master to disciple.

Within this great artisan tradition, where all production was commercial, woman as producer played a passive role. She assisted her husband in the work of the preparatory processes, but no woman was a member of the *srenis*—the craft guilds—nor did women work in the royal *karkhanas* or

workshops. There were no women artisans, no stone carvers, no women goldsmiths, no women beating copper into shape. This was not only the case where the nature of the work demanded the strength of man, but also in crafts like enamelling and inlay, where infinite precision and delicacy were needed.

Within the sphere of classical patronage, where artisans congregated for work under one roof and where the craftsmen produced for the master, the woman had no place. But the moment the commercial base ended and craft work became the total expression of a vigorous folk aesthetic consciousness, woman emerged as the focal point of ornamental expression and the reservoir of an unbroken tradition of design consciousness.

Bana's *Harshacharita*, written in the 6th century A.D. paints a picture of women at the wedding of the princess Rajasri,

> "From the furthest orient had come the queens of all the feudatories, noble, high-bred, shapely, well-clad unwidowed dames with lines of vermillion powder glittering on their foreheads. Thronging the household they sang sweet well-omened songs containing allusions to the bride and bridegroom's families; or with fingers steeped in diverse colours dyed neck-strings; or employed their skill in leaf and plant painting to adorn polished cups and collections of unbaked clay-ware; or stained skeins of cotton thread for bamboo baskets and fabrics of wool for marriage amulets; or manufactured cosmetics, compounded of saffron paste clothed by *balacana* essence, and face unguent adding distinction to beauty; or made strings of cloves mingled with the *kakkola* fruit, containing also nutmegs, and large bright lumps of crystalline camphor threaded in the intervals."

At a traditional wedding today, women perform identical functions.

An ancient tradition in India maintains that the Asoka tree, that is barren of flower, breaks into bloom at the touch of a beautiful woman's foot. Indian aesthetics, as manifest in poetry, painting, sculpture, ornament and craft expresses the same feeling towards woman. *Alankar*, the theory of ornament, rests sterile unless revealed and accentuated through the tensions of a woman's form.

RICHEST FLOWERING

Sanskrit literature is rich in the symbology of ornament seeking inspiration in the woman's form. In the Gupta period,

when beauty was worshipped as an aspect of religion, Indian aesthetics had its richest flowering. A tremendous wave of creative activity found expression in sculpture, painting and all forms of ornamentation. The woman's form—with its contours, its floral ornaments, its jewellery and its varying hair-styles—became the fountain source of ornamental expression. In hair-styles alone there were hundreds of variations of style and ornament. We have mention of the bee coiffure, the "peacock feather style", the honey comb style, etc.

The inspirer of ornament in the classical field within the folk vision was woman, the creator of ornament. Folk expression knows no secular art of decoration. All forms are functional and linked to the ritual that embraces the total life of the village.

The *rasa* (essence–taste–ecstasy) that permeates every thought, form and pattern of village life has as one of its main roots woman's vision. The *alponas* and *rangolis*–the geometric forms that decorate the walls and floors of the mud huts—the *khovar* wall paintings of the Maithil villagers, where the songs of Vidyapati telling of the loves of Radha and Krishna are sung from village to village, the magnificent folk embroideries of Bengal, Gujerat and the Punjab—all these are direct products of woman's creative impulses and of the myths and symbols, the folk stories and romances that have gone to build up her background.

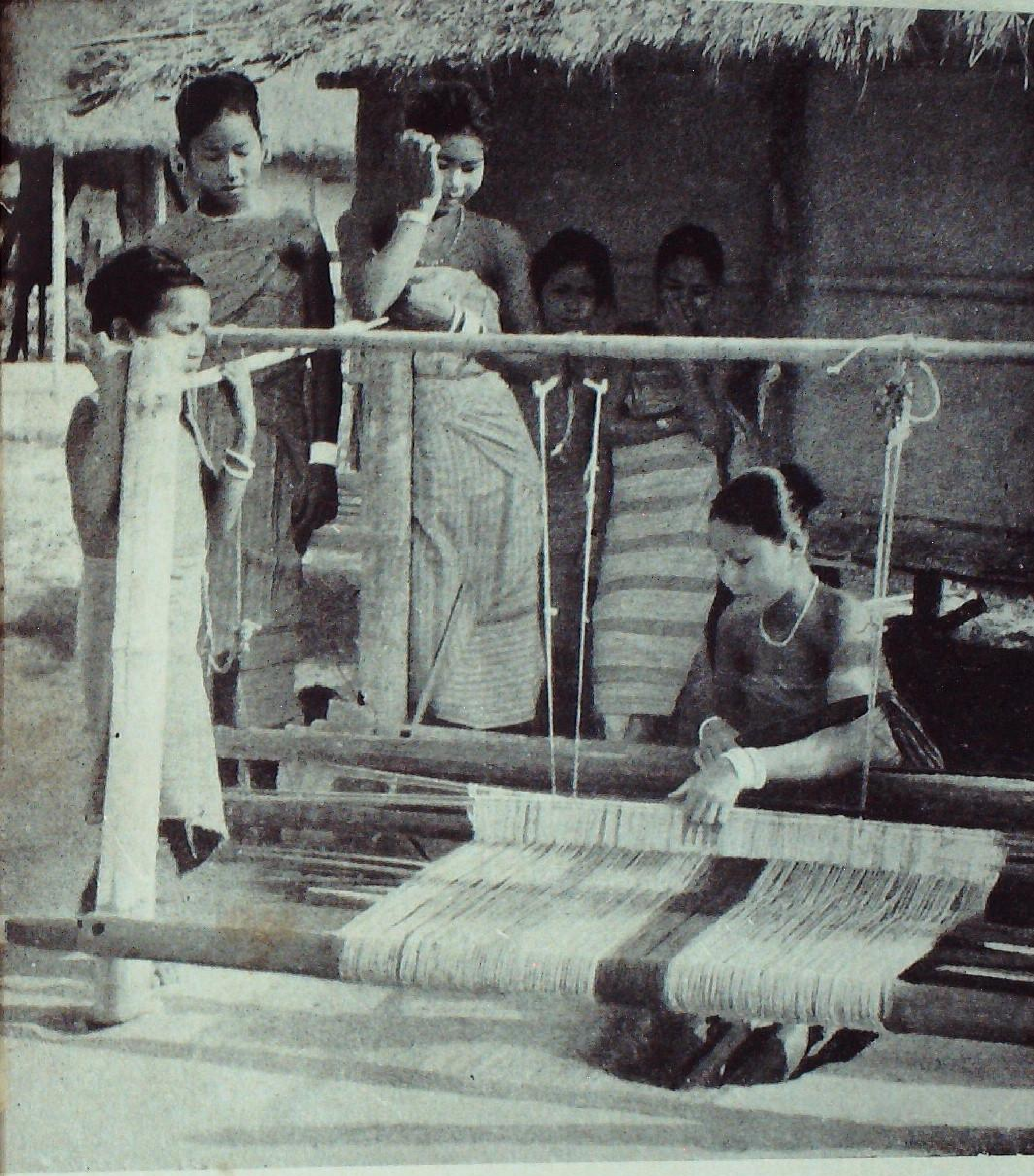
To comprehend the role woman plays in the craft expressions of village life, we have to see her fulfilling two functions, often simultaneously. There is woman as one in a family unit for craft production and an integral element in folk economy, and there is woman who creates craft objects not for economic reasons but as a gesture of joy and love, a spontaneous response of tradition. On all auspicious occasions, at marriages and at the various festivals that usher in the changing seasons, woman dictates the ornamental forms, the symbols, the colours that emerge with such startling clarity in the various rituals. In these forms are reflected the changing tones of Nature, of mood and attitudes, the abandon of spring or the joy of harvesting. The woman who sits embroidering her marriage skirt or shawl in the Punjab or Kutch, or making the *sikki* grass tortoise or

horse that is part of every bride's trousseau in the Maithil country, or who paints the *rangoli* design on the walls of the village hut in Gujerat or Orissa is the woman who expresses through her symbols a vast source of myth and unconscious meaning and impressions. Her motifs carry the tones of village songs and dances, the perfume of tender pink blossoms, green leaf buds, the vigour of the elemental forms and colours that surround her and permeate her vision.

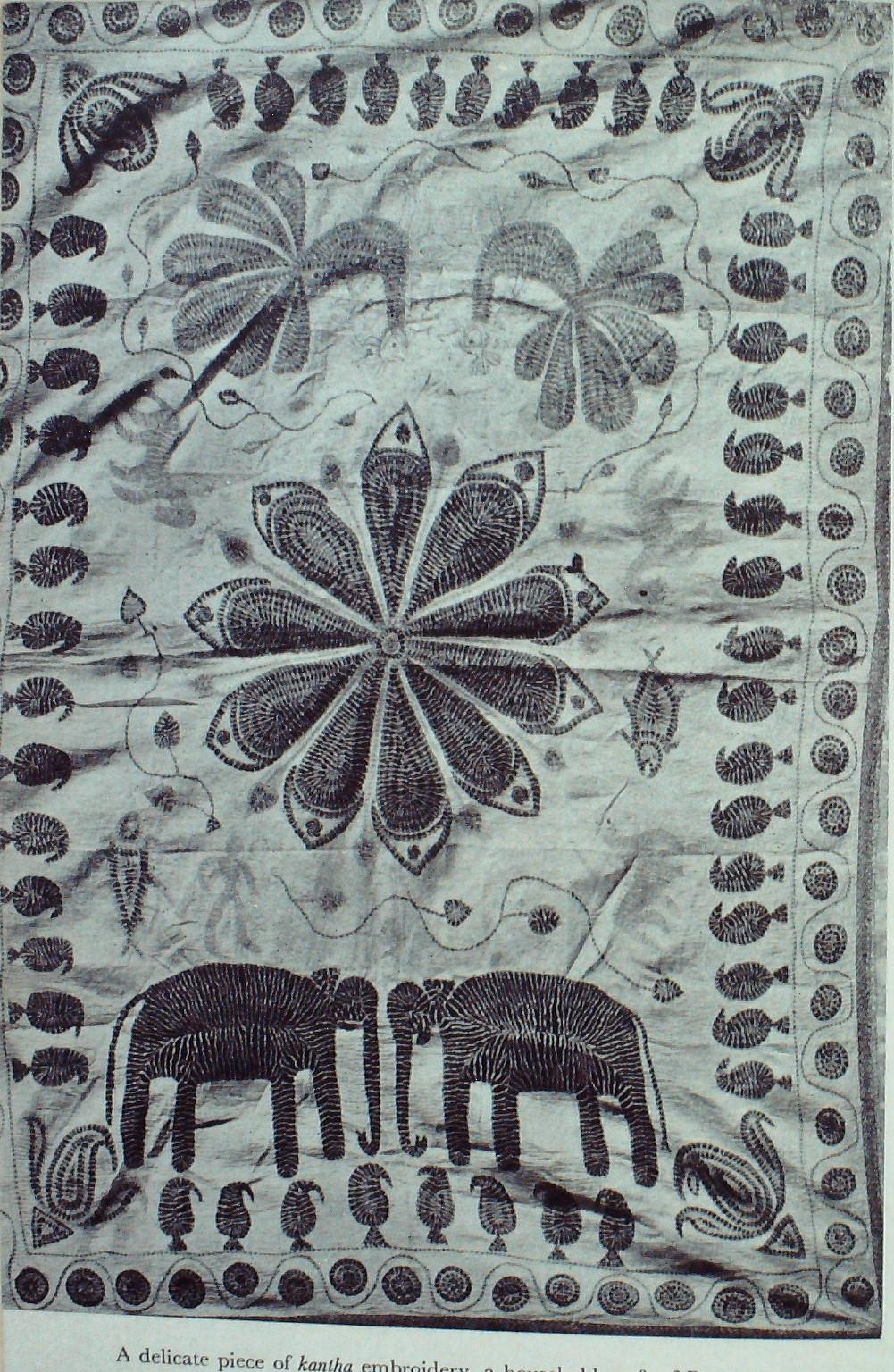
In the village where the family is the unit of craft expression, the woman works in joint endeavour with the man. If the potter turns the wheel and moulds clay into shape, it is the woman who paints on the clay pots the abstract motifs and angular shapes. It is the woman potter who moulds the clay into the elephants and horses and human figurines that adorn village huts, are sold in every village fair and are used as ritual offerings in tribal areas. The massive moulding, the vitality and elemental s mplicity of the forms of these clay figures, found all over India, bear testimony to the unconscious knowledge of space and form that within tradition permeates the vision of woman.

EMBROIDERY

In the field of extiles, woman's contribution has been most outstand ng in the case of embroidery. The embroidered fabrics of India are manufactured both for commercial purposes and for home consumption. The richest samples of indigenous folk embroideries made by women are to be found where nomadic influences are richest. The magnificent running stitch, the *kantha* embroidery of Bengal, is among the finest examples of woman's work. The figures drawn on the cloth with such sureness and vitality are the work of women who do the embroidery. They are not copies of pictorial prototypes. The designer and craftsman are one in a unitary process. The world *kantha* means rag and the embroidery is made from the worn white *saris* of women in Bengal. The coloured threads used in the borders are drawn out and



Weaving as a cottage craft among women in the Assam Hills



A delicate piece of *kantha* embroidery, a household craft of Bengal

Women of Maharashtra adorning the floor with *alpona* design in coloured rice powder.

Women of the Punjab at the spinning wheel

are then embroidered into the cloth, which has been previously quilted. These *kanthas* are used as coverings for keeping books or as pillow or bed covers.

The patchwork figure embroideries of Bharaich (U. P.) are another example of women's work. They are used as offering flags at a local *dargah* or Muslim shrine. In Orissa, patchwork embroidered umbrellas and awnings are made by women. In the Punjab, no bride's trousseau is complete without the *phulkari* embroidered veil. *Phulkari* means flower garden. In the Himalayas at Basohli, Kangara and Chamba, the loves of Krishna and Radha are used as the inspiration source of the square embroidered cloth or *rumal.* In concept it is closely linked to the miniature schools of painting of the same region. In Kutch and Saurashtra chain and satin stitch embroidery are used both on satin and coarse cloth for skirts and bod ces, and in embroidered squares and runners for the decoration of the home. It is imperative for every girl to know embroidery. The mother teaches the daughter. The early years of a girls' life are spent in embroidering the bodices and *torans* that will accompany her to her husband's house.

In the commercial field of embroidery women take little part. Till recently no women were engaged in the gold thread embroideries of Agra and Delhi and the *chikan* embroideries of Lucknow. Kashmir embroideries, which are famous for their excellence, are the products of male skill. Women in Kashmir do not embroider cloth and use comparatively little embroidery on their clothes.

A field of textiles where women's work has been outstanding is the tie-dye *bandhana* cloth of Gujerat, Saurashtra, Rajasthan and Madura. The *bandhana* or *chundri* tie-dye sari is the wedding garment of women in many parts of the country where folk traditions survive in their richest form. It is a garment that symbolizes romance and love and figures in most folk songs and love lyrics in India.

The man in the village dyes the cloth after it has been tied, but it is the woman who, carrying knowledge of the design and the technique, ties the cloth into innumerable

designs. The work is complicated and demands great skill. Various colours are often used in the same cloth, the cloth being re-tied after each dyeing process is completed. Elephants, birds, flowers and charming dancing dolls are revealed in the designs. The women craft workers are known as *bandhanaris*. The material is folded several times. The *bandhanari* allows the nails of her thumb and fore-finger to grow long, and these act as a pair of pincers. The woman takes the cloth and ties various sections with a string. A resist paste is sometimes used to stop colour from penetrating. The thread is not cut but carried from one point to the next. It is kept in place by the tightness of the final twist. The cloth is then ready for the dyer. The finest of the *bandhana* saris are the *gharcholas* of Saurashtra. The cloth is a hand-woven muslin from Andhra. Gold strips are used horizontally and vertically to divide the cloth into great squares. The tie-dye work is done within the square and in the more elaborate *gharcholas* every square is a separate design. The work is extraordinarily intricate. The *chundri* is worn both by rich and poor. In the more expensive *bandhana* cloths a fine cotton handwoven cloth or silk is used and the work is very fine. In the cheaper *chundris* the cloth is thick cotton and the dots and designs are big and vigorous and display great abandon, freedom and vitality.

In the main weaving centres of India, women play subsidiary role. They assist in the preparatory processes of warping and winding, but rarely sit at the loom. In Assam, Manipur, Tripura and in all tribal areas where weaving is practised, it is the woman who weaves and the man takes no part in the production of cloth. In Assam and Manipur, weaving is not a commercial activity. Every home has a loom and each area and each tribe in the hills has individual designed cloths. These cloths, the *mekhalas* and *rihas*, which are worn as shawls and waist cloths by women, and the Naga cloths worn by men display an extraordinary knowledge of abstract design and harmony of colour. The looms used are simple bamboo loin looms.

Doll making is another sphere where women have undisputed sway. Like the *kanthas* of Bengal, most cloth dolls are

made from rags. The faces of the dolls are often embroidered with black thread. Great care is taken in the costumes and jewellery. Some dolls are given nose rings, bangles and anklets made from glass beads or copper wire.

In Gwalior, multi-coloured paper dolls are made by women to represent the bride and bridegroom. Every region has its dolls of paper, cloth, wood or clay, and the dolls of every region carry in their little forms the special impressions and traditions of the area.

NEW ROLE

In recent years, with the breaking down of traditions, the building of roads and the advent of machines, the woman artisan is emerging in a new role. The rising cost of living has made it necessary for most women to take to some form of employment in order to supplement the family income. Women are caught in the economic struggle of supply and demand and are unable to meet the challenge of a competitive society. The old traditional forms of production, where they had a known and secure place, no longer exist. The infiltration of machine-made goods has disrupted village crafts.

Social organizations of women have tried to solve the problem of employment of middle class and rural women by starting various types of training-cum-production centres for crafts. The necessity of rehabilitating and finding gainful employment for the thousands of refugee women has brought the problem into sharp focus. Amateur both in organization and vision, these training-cum-production centres started by social institutions are incapable of producing craftsmen or craft objects that have any value aesthetically or commercially. The woman craft worker has been torn from her roots and divorced from her social relationships and environment. The objects she produces today are no longer expressions of a tradition within which design consciousness was nurtured and found maturity. With failure in the norms that dictated symbol, contour and colour, woman's aesthetic vision is growing

sterile and bereft of meaning. Conflicts of rapidly changing ideologies and an altered social structure have created tension and a crisis. Woman's response to change is slower than that of man. No easy solution to the problem seems possible. The necessity of treating the problem professionally is essential. New sources of design are necessary along with new techniques and the use of new materials to suit the demands of a changing consumer market.

It is difficult to estimate to what extent it will be possible to use the old design source materials to fit new functions. The extraordinary knowledge of structure and colour present in the traditional woman's consciousness will have to be utilized if we are to produce craft objects which carry within themselves the uniqueness of this country's design roots. But application of the old forms will have to be undertaken with infinite sensitivity and appreciation.

The object of creating new sources of employment for women has made it necessary to transform the nature and structure of craft production so that, in essence, it has become an aspect of industry. The creation of a prototype and the copying of the prototype in terms of mass production destroys the meaning of crafts.

If, in this country, craftsmanship has to continue to exist it can only do so either as part of a tradition or as an individual expression both in the source of production and in texture and character.

VOLUNTARY SOCIAL SERVICE

Freda Bedi

When we realize that the number of voluntary social welfare agencies and institutions in present-day, India has been estimated at 10,000, and that the majority of these deal with services directly or indirectly concerned with women and children and the socially, mentally or physically handicapped, we shall see that the harvest of pioneer efforts made on modern lines is a rich one. It is necessary here to stress the phrase "modern lines". Necessary, because in our zeal for social welfare of the new pattern we should not forget that social welfare is as old as the human community itself, and that if women today are the most indefatigable social workers, they too were, if not the initiators, at least the administrators of what amounted to social services in India in ancient, medieval and more recent times.

From earliest recorded history we have stories of the philanthropy not only of kings but of queens, particularly in times of famine or disaster. In particular, a passage in the *Rajatarangini*, Kalhana's ancient history of the kings of Kashmir, comes to my mind, where some now forgotten queen is shown working side by side with her husband among the famine-stricken, and with him giving to the least of her possessions to hold back the flood of hunger. Charity and alms giving have indeed always been a sign of devotion in India; from time immemorial the temples have been filled with the lame and the halt, the blind and the poverty stricken who could be sure of getting their regular toll of alms from the many women who came to worship. Again, the temples have been a refuge for the homeless and provided the first rudimentary forms of "shelter". In Moghul times, the queens and ladies of the Court also, from religious motives, took an interest in the orphaned and the destitute.

Undoubtedly, the earliest social impulses of this kind were connected with religion and the religious way of life. As

ancient as India itself are the concepts of *dharma*, not only as the natural order of things but in terms of man's sacred duty to fellow man; and of *karma*, the law of moral as well as physical cause and effect, which brought man inevitably the good and bad results of his good and bad actions. Compassion, *karuna*, for all life was a religious as well as a social virtue. It was inevitable, therefore, that in the Indian context social service should have an intense religious background. Inevitable too, that, even to the present day, those who may be regarded as the most dedicated social workers have almost invariably been men and women who practised the religious ideals of self-abnegation, voluntary poverty and often *brahmacharya* or celibacy. In interpreting the spirit of India in a memorable poem of great beauty, Rabindranath Tagore addresses his country :

> "....Thou hast taught the householder to enlarge the home to neighbour, friend, guest and the orphan.
> Luxury hast thou bound with restraint,
> Poverty hast thou brightened with pure distaste for the world,
> Wealth thou hast blest spent on doing good.
> Thou hast taught men to set self-aside and in weal and woe to set the world down
> Before the Lord."

It is, however, woman, as mother and head of the family, who may be termed a social welfare institution in herself. According to Indian tradition, the joint family, in which members of the family grew up, married and lived under one roof with all their children, was itself a self-contained unit giving social security to all its members. The physically handicapped were accepted as part of it, whether they could earn or not, and they would never lack food, or the emotional satisfaction of being loved or wanted. Where cousin and brother and sister were almost interchangeable terms (in modern India, a cousin is often referred to as cousin-sister or cousin-brother to save her or him the feeling that any discrimination is being made) the loss of a parent or even both parents, was a much less serious matter. Unemployment, sickness and the like were not so frightening when the joint kitchen was there to see that all had food. If, in the poorer groups, hardship was involved, particularly for the women, in that a number of non-contributing

mouths had to be fed, all would have been ashamed to mention it, knowing well that they themselves might have been in the same position or might later have to face the same blows of fate.

It was within the joint family that the widow of Hindu tradition found her shelter. After the death of her husband, sometimes when she was a mere child, she would be subjected to the ugly rituals of shaving her head and putting on the white or red rough cotton *sari* that would be her uniform for the rest of her life. Separated by her sorrow from the auspicious ceremonies and festivals of the household, she had to make her own place in the family unit.

Much has been said of the tragedy of the life of the Hindu widow and the almost unbearable asceticisms imposed on her, but less is known of the sometimes remarkable and beautiful characters who have come through this school of suffering to be the guardian angels not only of the sick, the suffering and all the children in the families which brought them up but have shed the light of their devotion on the world outside. The Hindu widow who becomes the servant of society is a very precious offshoot of Hindu tradition, and is still in a very living way making her contribution to Indian society. Pandita Ramabai is an outstanding 19th century example; her living counterparts are Lady Venkata Subba Rao, Smt. Thankamma in Kerala, Smt. Kamalabai Hospet in Madhya Pradesh and Smt. Sujata Das in Bengal, among countless others.

THE CRY FOR REFORM

By the middle of the 19th century, when Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar came to the forefront with their cry for reform that touched caste, *sati*, the ban on widow remarriage and the dearth of educational facilities for women, the need for reassessment on the social plane was desperate. The first impact of Western ideas and the coming of the first Christian missionary groups, in particular the establishment of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Bangalore,

also highlighted the glaring defects in the orthodox approach to questions like the welfare of women in India.

Vital too was the work of the stalwarts of what may be termed the Indian reform group, mainly composed of men dedicated to the cause of women's uplift, including Gokhale and the first members of the Servants of India Society, founded in 1905. Even before them came the group who manned the "Social Conferences" of the last twenty years of the 19th century, including Bhandarkar Veerasalingam from the South and Na endra Nath Sen. Sir Ganga Ram in the Punjab was another who devoted himself to the cause.

Lest it be said that all the names in the above list are of men, we must face with gratitude the fact that the Indian woman's greatest helpers in the modern period have been men, who used the better position that society gave them to forward the cause of women. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the women's movement in India has shown hardly any suffragette tendencies, and why the fight for their protection and rights has been one in which progressive-minded men and women have worked shoulder to shoulder. The remarkable rights that the Indian woman has achieved in the Indian Constitution, drafted again by two great male helpers of the women's cause, Benegal Narsing Rau and Dr. Ambedkar, can also be traced directly to this healthy community of purpose, strengthened in the social reform field for nearly a hundred years.

PANDITA RAMABAI

Outstanding among the women of this period is the figure of Pandita Ramabai. Born in an orthodox Brahman family, the child's first years were spent with her family, often on pilgrimage. Her intelligence and learning were great; at the age of twelve she could recite 20,000 Sanskrit verses by heart. Deprived of both mother and father in the famine of 1876, the young girl and her brother were left alone in the world. Their life for the next four years was one of almost unbearable hunger and hardship. During the course of their travels, the

young woman, steeled by these sufferings, found courage to stand on the platform at Calcutta to lecture on social reform. It was during these days that she met the young *sudra* pleader who was to become her husband.

But Fate stepped in again. The shelter of a home and the joy of a family were once again taken from her; the blow of widowhood fell at the early age of twenty-two. From then on, this intrepid woman turned her mind towards a wider and socially useful life. She went to Poona, where she founded the *Arya Mahila Samaj.* It was not, however, until she had crossed the hurdle of learning the English language and had visited England (where she became a Christian) that she was able to found her *Sharada Sadan*, a widow's home, in 1899. So great was her elation at this achievement that she wrote at that time : "I am crying for joy that my dream of years has become a reality".

Strangely enough, when that other great friend of the widow in India, Dhondo Keshab Karve, began his great work, his second marriage with a widow from the home of Pandita Ramabai was the turning point of his life. When faced with the problem of remarriage, he said he refused to marry unless his second wife was a widow. It was then that the first widow remarriage to take place in Poona was solemnized in 1893, on March 11. It touched off a storm of protest, in the course of which Gudubai and her husband had to live in seclusion away from the family so that the whole home should not come under boycott.

In 1896 Prof. Karve established a school for the education of widow which later moved to Hingne, near Poona, and has now become a real women's University, opening its doors to all women and girls but particularly serving widows, the deserted and the poor. On its rolls today are 1,400 students, and "Anna", as Dhondo Keshav is called, is still there, a grand old man of 99, to bless it with his inspiring presence. During the year which leads up to his centenary, admirers are organizing the collection of a crore* of rupees for the development of the University.

*Ten million

Meanwhile, in other parts of India, the drive to help women in distress was being carried on. As early as 1875, in Pandharpur, the first home for abandoned babies came into being. It still performs its difficult work with tact and discretion, happy to be able to say that the first violent opposition to the helping of the unmarried mother has died down. The scope of its work may be ascertained from these figures given for the year 1941-50 for the W.D. Nowrungay Orphanage and Foundling Asylum, as it is called :

Women admitted to the maternity home	1,109
Deserted wives	162
Widows	664
Unmarried girls	283
Children born in the home	979

Christian social work for women started earlier. The earliest work was that of the Serampore Mission in Bengal at the end of the 18th century. In 1854, the Good Shepherd Convent in Bangalore started its work of mercy with twenty small girls rescued from the streets. At the time of the celebration of its hundredth anniversary of service in 1954, the figures of women admitted and children cared for was given in the form of the following chart :

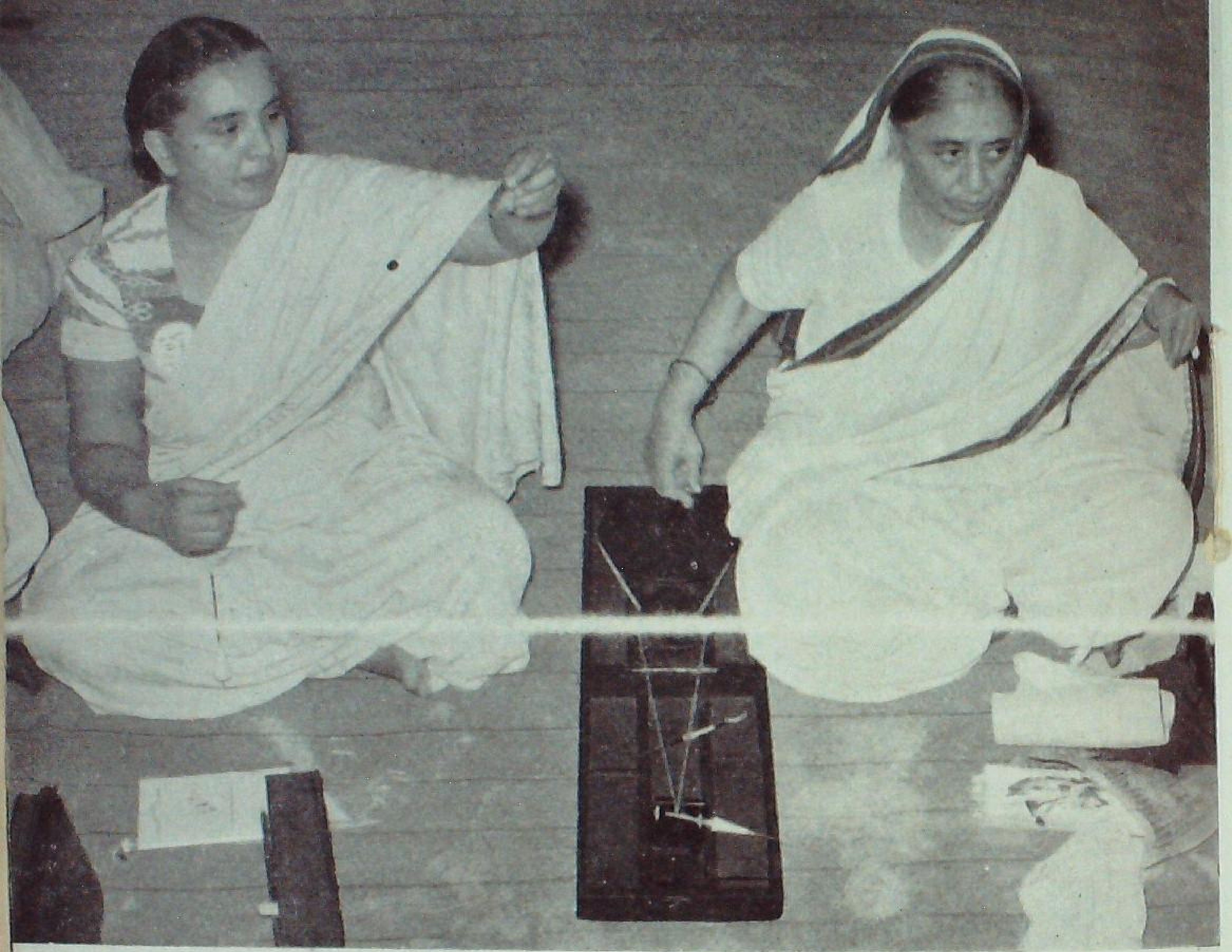
	Number admitted since 1854	Number at present
1. Social Reform and Re-educational Centres ..	14,338	656
2. Homes for Unmarried Mothers and ..	3,951	80
Abandoned Babies ..	5,104	62

This represents the figure for one convent alone. Branches of the Good Shepherd Convent were also founded in Bellary and Mysore in 1865 and 1878, respectively. Two more convents were founded in 1922 and 1925 for the same work. The whole adds up to a wonderful record of service by an intrepid band of women, European and Indian, who, particularly in the middle of the last century, faced almost unbelievable hardships and disasters with cheerfulness. There is no doubt that

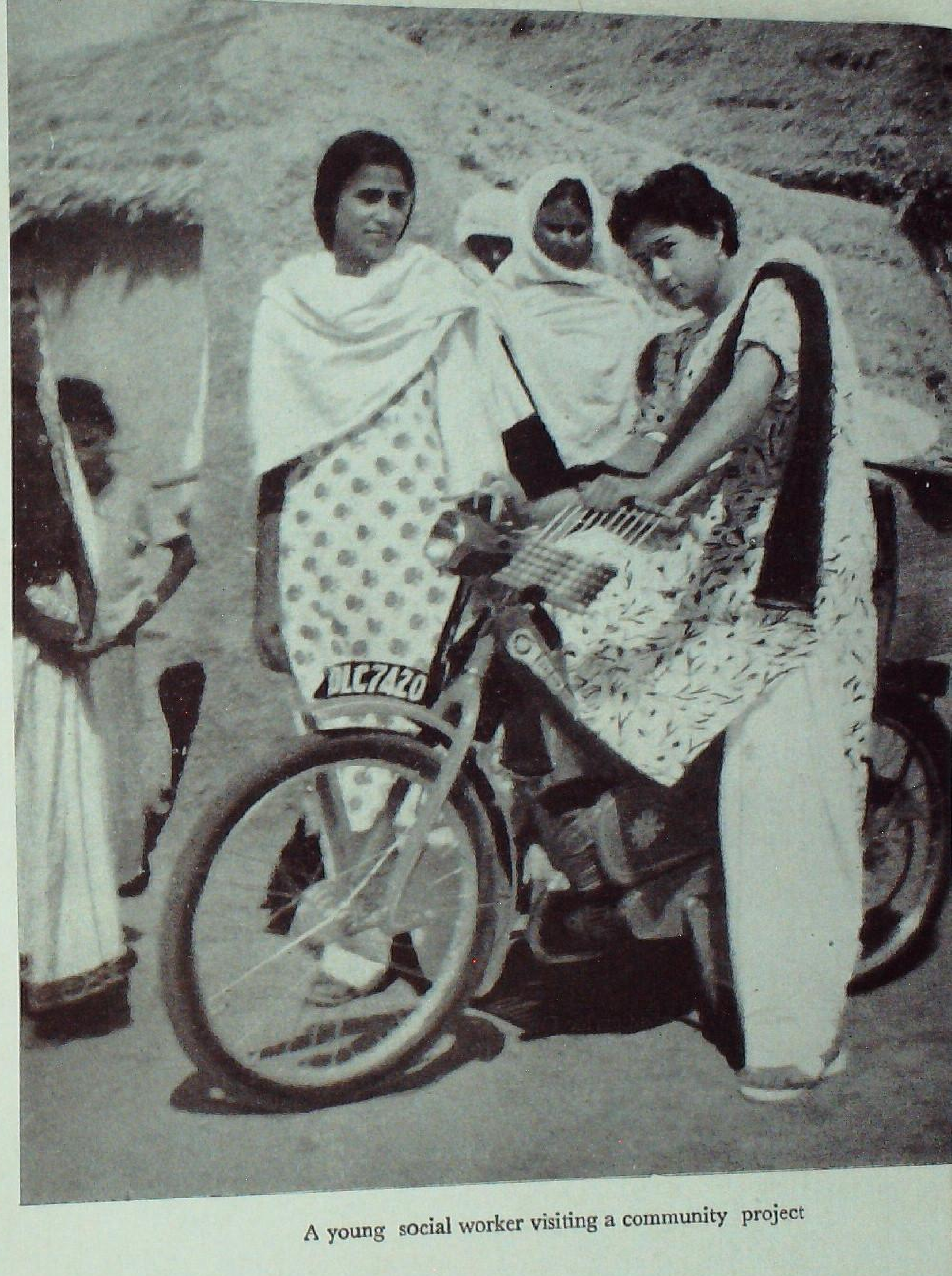
Smt. Rajbansi Devi, wife of the President of India, presiding over a meeting of the Bharat Gramin Mahila Sangha, an organization of farm-women

Farm-girls leaving for the U.S.A. under an International Farm Youth Exchange Programme of the H. H. Clubs and Ford Foundation

Smt. Janaki Devi Bajaj receiving an award for social servicef rom the President



Mass spinning during the All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan. Smt. Rameshwari Nehru (right) and Dr. Sushila Nayar spinning in the Gandhian tradition

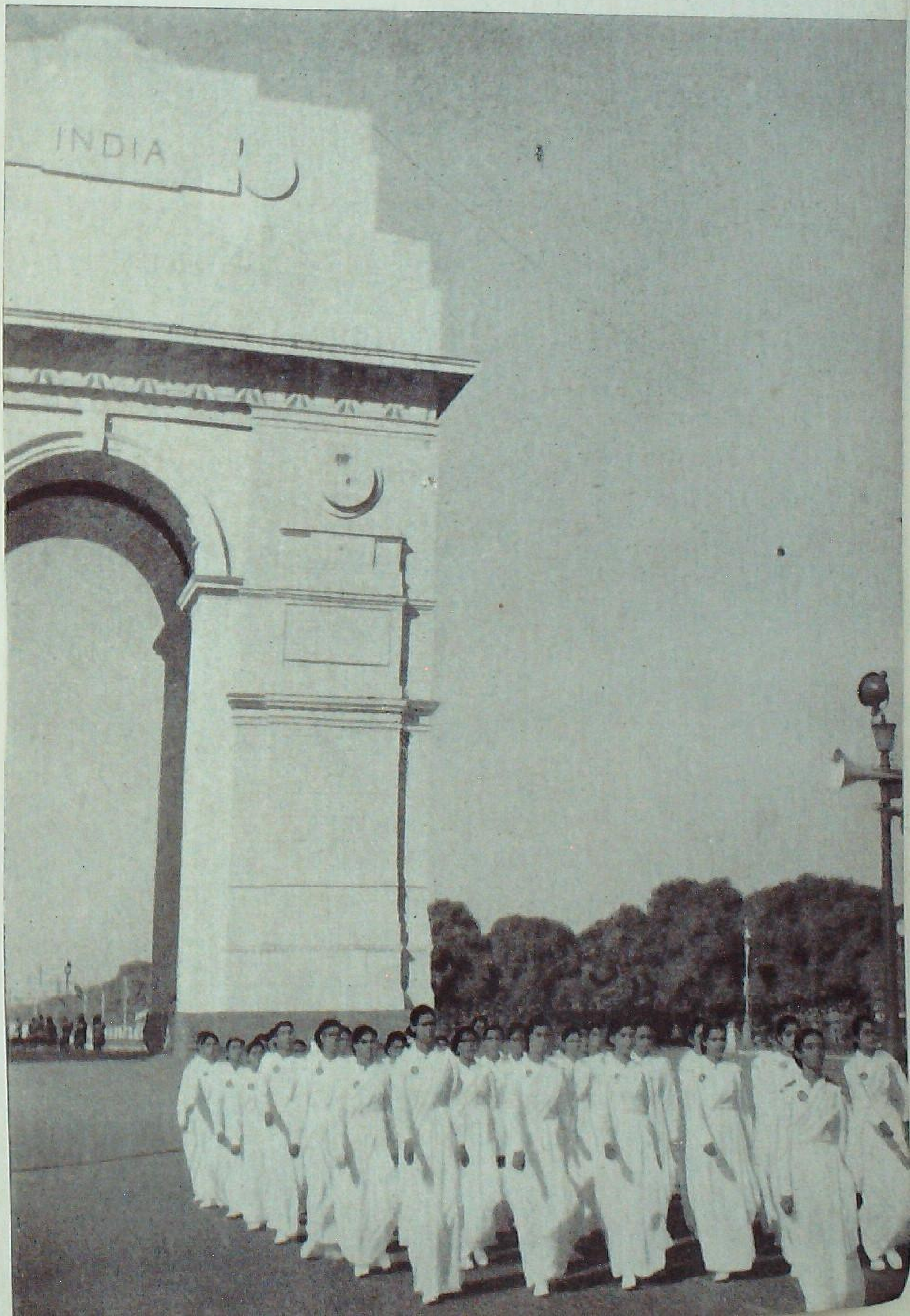


A young social worker visiting a community project

A social worker demonstrates how to bathe a baby

Trainees of the Women's Service Organization, Indore, being taught stenography

Republic Day Parade, 1957, showing the Nurses' Contingent



Village women working on a self-help project

their example heartened other pioneers. In the same way the Catholic sisters, "Little Sisters of the Poor", began their first institution for the aged in Calcutta in 1882, following it up in 1903 with a home for the aged in Secunderabad.

In the meantime, under the powerful inspiration of Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, which has been perhaps the most devoted of the non-Christian missions taking care of the socially handicapped in India, the Home of Service was founded in Banaras for the many aged and destitute men and women who came to the city, sacred to Siva, in order to attain *mukti* (salvation) on the banks of the Ganga. Intent in the belief that freedom from rebirth would follow this last great effort, widows and the aged would leave home and spend their last days begging or in penury there.

The Home of Service, which has already celebrated its Golden Jubilee, was the forerunner of a chain of social welfare, educational and medical institutions which are now scattered all over India. Laying special stress on the needs of the students and the TB patient, the Mission has again in later years stressed the need of women social workers, and is already on the way to founding a special women's *math* (monastery) in the name of Sri Sarada Mani, the celibate and devoted wife of Sri Ramakrishna. Sister Nivedita, a European disciple of Swami Vivekananda, laid early stress on better educational opportunities for women in Bengal.

POLITICS AND SOCIAL REFORM

It was, however, the teens of the 20th century that saw the next big leap forward in women's work and a change in its quality. A really strong group of politically conscious women, who saw the intimate connection between politics and social reform, emerged. Annie Besant and her colleagues in the Theosophical Society at Adyar, and Margaret Cousins, also schooled against a suffragette background, were the hub of a group of remarkable personalities who flung themselves wholeheartedly into this field. While it does not come within

the scope of this chapter to detail their fight, it is interesting here to note this statement of Margaret Cousins:–

> "We had to approach the Government several times for more and better schools for girls, for more health centres, for legislation to protect children and to close brothels, to reform marriage laws, to enforce the Child Marriage Act, to give inheritance rights, to grant us adequate franchise and non-communal representation, to allow temple entry for Harijans. Surely all these matters are a concern of the Government, and if the Government should fail to enforce the Child Marriage Act, to give inheritance rights, too difficult to define what are politics and what are not."

Working with these women were Smt. Jinarajadasa, Smt. Rukmini Lakshmipati, Lady Sadasiva Iyer and Hirabai Tata of Bombay, interested in the great pioneering social work done by the House of Tata in India. Of the same active group, and still living, is Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, nearing eighty now, first Alderwoman of the Madras City Corporation, first President of the Madras Legislative Council and a veteran social worker. Her life illustrates clearly how those who took up political slogans learned later to concentrate on social reform and themselves became the founders of institutions. The Avvai Home in Madras for destitute and rescued women, the legislation against the dedicating of girls to temples (which had degenerated into prostitution) and, finally, the setting up of the Madras Cancer Institute are all the work of this amazing woman, who has been given a high award by the Indian Government. In the field of reform of children's institutions, and recently in the capacity of Chairman of the State Social Welfare Advisory Board set up in Madras, she has intensified her work for many sections of the handicapped and for the spread of voluntary social services into the villages.

THE GANDHIAN TOUCH

The next abiding influence on the attitude to and activity of women in the national social welfare sphere came from the touch of Mahatma Gandhi. With his unerring instinct he realized that, in the great non-violent struggle for freedom, women. being more non-violent by nature, had a great role

to play. His own approach to life was so integrated, encompassing all aspects of daily life and not limiting itself to the political, that in his search for social truth he was bound to accord to women a very important position.

Gandhiji, or Bapu as he was affectionately called, believed deeply in women. He knew their moral strength and respected their individuality. There has been no more determined opponent of the oppression of women in modern times. In village work, in particular in his constructive programme, Bapu allowed women to play an important role. The beginning of what we call rural social welfare work was truly in the hands of men and women workers mainly connected with the Sewagram Ashram—Maniben Patel, Pushpaben Mehta, Sushila Nayyar, Miraben and Ashadevi Aryanayakam come to my mind, among many others. Janki Devi, widow of the late Jamnalal Bajaj, later to become a great *Bhoodan* worker, is also worthy of mention. She has recently been decorated by the Government with the Padma Vibhushan.

This great tradition of Gandhian social work has crystallized on the women's side in the Kasturba National Memorial Trust, with which other well-known names like Sarladevi Sarabhai, Mata Rameshwari Nehru, Lady Thackersey and Sushila Behn Pai are connected. This organization has not only trained many thousands of village level workers, but is now in charge of the entire village workers and midwives training programmes of the Central Social Welfare Board of the Government of India, with which we shall deal later.

Another more modern aspect of rural social welfare work is represented by the two-year old Bharatiya Gramin Mahila Sangh, whose President is Rajbansi Devi, wife of the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Another executive member, the Maharani of Patiala, always interested in the problems of farmers' wives, is now Chairman of the new larger Punjab State Social Welfare Advisory Board. Others taking a keen interest in this project are Rajmata Kamlendu Mati Shah of Tehri Garhwal, well-known for her work among hill women, and Dr. Krishnabai Nimbkar, who has taken a special interest in community development work.

The Gandhian stream of social welfare activity in India is not easy to discover because it follows the traditional Indian pattern of selfless work, which shuns publicity. But its remarkable adaptation to Indian conditions of work and life has without doubt ensured that now we have many *gram sevikas* and midwives tough enough to stand the most backward conditions and to work in the most remote villages. This is no small result of the concentrated activity which has gone on uninterrupted since the death of Ba, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, during her days of imprisonment in the last stages of the National Movement.

It is difficult to put into words the electric effect of Gandhiji's confidence in women. It irradiated even simple and illiterate village women with a new confidence in their role in life. They worked the harder for it. If the Indian National Movement because of this attitude never lacked women workers, the modern social welfare movement and even beyond that the very shape of modern Indian society has been conditioned by this liberation of the energies of women. It would not be exaggerating matters to say that our woman ambassador, Smt. Pandit, the first Union Health Minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and the Speaker of the former Delhi State Assembly, Dr. Sushila Nayar, are all examples of the heights to which women whom Bapu trusted have reached. At lower levels, the increasing flood of women workers and social welfare workers all over the country are an inevitable result of his inspiration. In days when ground-breaking work still has to be done, often in difficult circumstances against social backwardness, we should do well to remember his words :

> "To call woman the weaker sex is libel: it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage ? Without her, man could not be. If non-voilence is the law of our being, the future is with woman."

AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The woman, who has played the biggest role in the development and organization of the voluntary social welfare

work in India since independence, was one of the group that faced the storm of civil disobedience days with Gandhiji. She was jailed in 1930 at the age of 21 as the first "woman dictator" of the national movement in Madras. Durgabai Deshmukh, who began serious studies while in Jail and afterwards became a fully qualified lawyer, specially concerned with women's cases, began her serious social welfare career by founding a girls' club at the University. This later developed into the Andhra Mahila Sabha, which now runs a very big industrial home and nurses training centre in Madras. Chosen as India's first member of the Planning Commission, Smt. Durgabai, as she was then called, was mainly responsible for the social welfare planning of the first Five Year Plan and herself was to implement its major recommendation for voluntary social welfare work—that a Central Board should be formed to co-ordinate, help and develop existing voluntary social work in the country. Over and above that, the duty of the Board was to increase social welfare services by means of voluntary workers sent into the rural areas where they had not so far penetrated.

The original Central Social Welfare Board under the chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh had twelve members, four of whom were representatives of the welfare Ministries. Prominent among the members were Smt. Indira Gandhi, who specializes in child welfare work, and Maniben Patel, representing the Gandhian rural tradition. The Board was strengthened by the addition of the late Smt. Hannah Sen, also a persistent worker for child welfare, Smt. B. Burgohain from Assam and Smt. Dhanvanti Rama Rau, a pioneer in family planning and also Chairman of the C.S.W.B. Committee on Social and Moral Hygiene. This Committee's plan, now in the process of implementation, will provide India with a network of district shelters and homes for the rescue and rehabilitation of women in moral danger and socially deprived women of all kinds.

A new member of the Central Board is Smt. Achamma Matthai, very much loved for her devoted service to refugees during the partition period and a big figure in Christian

social welfare work in the country, so highly developed in the national Y.W.C.A. movement.

It is interesting to note that the activities of the Central Social Welfare Board are confined to groups and institutions working for women and children, physically and socially handicapped children (the blind, deaf, dumb, crippled and mentally handicapped and juvenile delinquents). On the development side, the Board has achieved remarkable success in the planning and execution of Welfare Extension Projects in the villages, over 2,000 in number, which have been described in greater detail in Smt. Deshmukh's chapter on "Women in National Planning". Another development has been the introduction of Urban Welfare Projects in the form of women's co-operative factories.

Over and beyond the proved usefulness of these projects, it is an important fact that voluntary social welfare workers have been responsible at all levels for planning and execution and this work has been co-ordinated with the employment of social welfare officers, inspectors and village level workers paid under proper service rules. It is in fact the greatest single post-independence achievement of India's women social workers that they have cast aside the barriers which traditionally divide the professional from the voluntary social welfare worker. They have succeeded in co-ordinating and consequently improving beyond recognition the results of their work in the greater interest of the Indian welfare state.

The scope of this voluntary social work will be increased during the second Five Year Plan mainly by the co-ordination of the Welfare Extension Projects in the villages with the work being done under the Community Development Programme. Here again, voluntary women workers will have a key role in the planning of the combined services.

VARIETY OF SOCIAL WORK

The variety of social welfare work done by women has been considerably enriched in recent years. Early work in

this sphere was almost exclusively done for the social uplift of women, and homes for destitute women, pre-natal and post-natal clinics, reception centres and shelters, social education centres, libraries and cultural and recreational services all had and have their part to play. A recent development has been the increase in vocational training centres and arts and crafts centres aiming at making women economically independent.

Social education work is of key importance in this field, and in this connection special mention must be made of Smt. Kulsum Sayani's work in Bombay, which has produced over three lakhs of literates and which has been guided by a first class neo-literate newspaper, *Rahbar*, produced and printed by her in her own home.

Examples of good work in this field are almost too many to mention, but the collective work of the Poona Sewa Sadan Society, and the chain of *mahila mandals* and their kin in the Saurashtra area of Bombay State come to mind. Mrs. Welthy Fisher and her workers of the Saksharta Niketan, Lucknow, have also contributed intelligent and planned work in the field of adult literacy.

In Bengal, Smt. Romola Sinha has done very useful pioneering work in the rescue of women, and the All Bengal Women's Union Home is the result of her endeavours. Pioneers in the Bombay-Gujerat-Saurashtra area have been Pushpaben Mehta and her workers, and Mridula Sarabhai, beginning with the "Jyoti Sangh" of Ahmedabad in the middle thirties. Whereas Pushpaben has developed her work into a chain of "shelters" and education centres which go by the name of *vikas grahs*, Miss Sarabhai has specialized since independence in the difficult work of organizing the rescue of abducted women and arranging their rehabilitation in life. This need, an aftermath of terrible days of rioting that followed Partition, is now almost fulfilled. Professional social welfare workers like Smt. V. Lakshmi of Madras have also done memorable work.

Smt. Shoilabala Das, an M. P. in 1954 when nearly 80, embodies in herself half a century of effort in the women's

cause. Born in Calcutta, educated in London and Cambridge, her field of activity was the comparatively backward Bihar and Orissa area. In 1905, she had already started an industrial school for girls. Specializing in women's education, she organized the first girls' high school, was later in life a Fellow and Syndicate member of Patna University and took an active interest in the National Council of Women.

It may be convenient here to mention that the All India Women's Conference and the National Council for Women, while not busying themselves primarily with social work, have attracted to their fold most of the best social workers of the period, have sponsored many useful social welfare projects and provided a training ground for many young workers.

Later developments in this field have been the formation of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, key workers of which in recent years have been Mata Rameshwari Nehru; Smt. K. Cama (now working with UNTAA) and Smt. Shanti Kabir. There is no doubt that the collection of material and the holding of all-India conferences, which a wider agency ensures, are of great value in creating public opinion and in motivating state-wide reorganization schemes and social legislation.

In U. P. recently a remarkable concentrated effort has been made by Smt. Leelavati Munshi, wife of the former Governor. Mrs. Munshi is also remembered for the organization of the All India Women's Food Council which, with the help of voluntary workers, provided cheap non-cereal food during a period of national scarcity.

ROLE OF Y.W.C.A.

A further significant contribution to women's work has been made by the Y.W.C.A. Not working specifically among Christians, it has been able to open a number of clean and attractively run hostels for working class women at rates they are able to pay. The Bombay and New Delhi hostels are

particularly fine. Christian institutions and workers, Catholic and Protestant, are numerous. In addition to many nameless nuns and mission workers, Smt. Padmini Sengupta of Bengal, Miss Ivy Khan, now the All India Y.W.C.A Secretary, and Smt. Sarah Chacko may be mentioned. Towering above all is the figure of Smt. Achamma Matthai, who has the much-needed combination of administrative excellence, organizing ability and a heart very receptive to human suffering.

The Parsi institutions and trusts of Bombay, which have proved a boon for the poorer members of that rich community of business men, are a story in themselves. Parsi women have not lagged behind the men of the Tata, Wadia, Cama and other big families. Hirabai Tata was matched in devotion by Bhicaiji Cama. Both are now dead, but Lady Cowasji Jhangir carries on the great tradition. In other fields, not limited to the Parsi community, outstanding social workers like Mary (Clubwalla) Jhadav, Jai Vakil and K. Cama are examples of the great contribution made by women from Parsi families.

Work among Muslim women presents its own problems, mainly due to old customs affecting the seclusion of women. The fight against *purdah* is by no means over, but the educated younger generation has not much time for it. The socially progressive Khoja community, with its Aga Khan charities, has done useful work, and in this Smt. Zarina Currimbhoy, now a member of the Central Social Welfare Board and working on all-India education committees, is outstanding. She has specialized in the organization of home industry and has been particularly successful in the organization of a home food supply service by Muslim women for the workers of Industrial Bombay. Begum Anis Kidwai in U. P.-Delhi and Padmaja Naidu in Hyderabad have also done very useful work over a long period of years, the latter during the sad period of civil turmoil in that State and later in the urgent work of food distribution. She is now Governor of W. Bengal. Jain social welfare work goes on quietly, and here again we find a widely appreciated and acknowledged woman leader in Srimati Brahamcharni Chanda Bai Jain, founder of the Jain Bala Bisram Ashram, Bihar.

CHILD WELFARE

Child welfare work in India developed much later than the work for women. In fact, except for voluntary workers helping blind and deaf children, some orphanages and early efforts at controlling juvenile delinquency by the Government, child welfare in the early stages was often just an addendum to work for women, since many destitute women were accompanied by children, unmarried mothers left their babies, and so on. Orphanages and child health services of various kinds, often under religious auspices, have been in the field. But it can be said that really good child welfare work in India has not emerged until comparatively recently, and only when the break-up of the joint family system failed to give children sufficient social protection. The growth of rambling industrial cities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay has also added to the need for organized work.

It is interesting to note here that while voluntary women social workers of the calibre of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi in Madras were mainly responsible for encouraging legislation for children, in effect the Children's Acts of 1921 onwards covering Madras, Bombay, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, the Punjab and U. P. were ahead of public opinion and preparedness. We are still catching up with the help of voluntary workers in the implementation of this legislation. The same may be said of the excellent provisions for the protection of children embodied in the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of the Constitution.

Women social welfare workers have naturally taken a big hand in the organization of child welfare services, and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, when she became Health Minister in 1947, initiated the work in the Indian National Committee of UNAC. Later, this was to develop into the Indian Council for Child Welfare, which was registered in May 1952. The late Smt. Hannah Sen and Smt. Indira Gandhi have both played vital roles in the development of the Indian Council, which co-ordinates voluntary child welfare work in many parts of India. Smt. Gandhi in particular, having seen much

child welfare work on her tours abroad, has taken a personal interest in pioneer efforts like the Bal Bhavan, a children's recreation centre being started in Delhi, and the Bal Sahyog (Children's Co-operative) for the reform of Delhi's street boys and destitutes.

In this field again, Lady Rama Rau is not to be forgotton. She has, in fact, specialized not in one direction but in many, her work for the All India Women's Conference and the organizing of Skippo mobile health vans and famine relief work being other spheres.

In the States, those actually working in children's projects of different types include such well-known names as Mary (Clubwalla) Jadhav, who is herself something of an institution. Connected with nearly 150 organizations and with what must be an all-India record of collecting one and a quarter crores of rupees for social welfare work, she has specially devoted her energies recently to the Guild of Service, co-ordinating many institutions for women and children in the Madras area. Besides, she is the moving spirit behind the model Sewa Samajam Boys' and Girls' Home in Madras. She has been decorated by the Indian Government for her services, has had 21 years' unbroken service as a Juvenile Magistrate and is now Sheriff of Madras. Gulistan Billimoria, another outstanding social worker, is currently Sheriff of Bombay.

Also working in Madras more recently, but with a great new institution, the Bal Mandir, to her credit is Smt. Manjubashini. Smt. Parijatham Naidu, Deputy Director, Social Services, in the Planning Commission and recently appointed Social Welfare Adviser to the Government of Indonesia, has done very fine work in Madras State. Bengal gives us Dr. Maitrayee Bose and Dr. Phul Renu Guha, who have taken great interest in refugee work, which has been an acute problem since the division of Bengal.

In Bombay State, Pushpaben Mehta's work for destitute children has been outstanding, and Taraben Premchand of the Shraddhanand Ashram for abondoned and destitute children has a niche all her own. Interestingly enough, the biggest of all-India children's organizations, like the Balkan-ji-Bari,

Manimela of Bengal and the Andhra Balananda Sangham have been mainly organized by men. A moving example of self-effacing and yet very efficient voluntary social welfare work among children (mainly recreational) is provided by Amy Rustomjee, Mithan Lam and Miss Cursetjee who in Bombay have organized children's vacation libraries and outings. Smt. Perin Captain, as Chief Commissioner of the Bharat Guides, and State Commissioners like Smt. Lakshmi Mazumdar have also done a great organizational job. In Hyderabad, Smt. Vellodi has left her mark.

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Outstanding voluntary work for handicapped children has been done by Smt. Jai Vakeel, who opened India's first Home for Mentally Handicapped Children in Bombay, combined with a training centre. Smt. Fatehman Ismail, whose own child was a victim of polio, has also done tremendous service to the country by making people conscious of the need for a polio hospital, which has been started under her own guidance. She is now working up a fellowship for the physically handicapped. Smt. Kamalabai Nimbkar has pioneered in occupational therapy and the rehabilitation of crippled children and has a centre in the K.E.M. Hospital in Bombay. A special school for blind girls (Andh Kanya Prakash Griha) is being lovingly directed by Smt. Vinoda Behn Ishwarbai Desai in Ahmedabad. Smt Dhan Devi Kapoor runs a like institution, Rashtriya Virjanand Andh Kanya Vidyalaya, in New Delhi.

Another breaker of new ground is Smt. Tara Ali Baig who, among other activities, organized blood bank work for the Civil Hospitals Emergency Committee in Bombay and was the founder of Pondicherry's first great effort to organize voluntary social welfare—the Magalir Kajagam and is a founder-member of the Women's International Club, Indonesia.

Creches, foundling homes, short-stay homes, nursery schools, child libraries and infant health centres are other types of work which have been and are being taken up by women all over the country.

PROFESSIONAL AND VOLUNTARY SERVICES

Professional social workers in India, many of them trained in America and others in the U.K. or in Indian schools of social work, form the bulk of members of the Indian Conference of Social Work, which is affiliated with the International Conference. In this organization, Smt. Hansaben Mehta, Vice-Chancellor of Baroda University, and Smt. Gulistan Billimoria have done much good work. The late Smt. Hannah Sen with her vital personality had a big role to play. Hannah Sen was also the first Principal of India's home science college, the Lady Irwin College in New Delhi, and the life and soul of the excellent band of voluntary social welfare workers who took up the women's savings campaign, which has made a magnificent contribution to the implementation of the first and second Five Year Plans.

It is undoubtedly a sign of the times that many of the young women in India who might before have taken up voluntary social service as a hobby are now choosing professional social work as a career. As the national social welfare services increase in complexity, this trend is bound to increase. The integration of various types of community development and Social Welfare Board work, which rely on public support and voluntary workers, with the machinery of the Five Year Plan makes the drawing of lines of distinction all the more difficult. In the future we can foresee that whereas there is no possible substitute for the dedicated woman social worker with half a life-time of social service to women and children behind her, we shall have to rely for the implementation of big projects on an increasing number of paid workers for institutions and agencies who may, in many cases, be drawn from former voluntary social workers. An interesting phenomenon is the number of entrants into the acknowledged schools of social work who are far beyond student age and have some years of service in social welfare institutions to their credit.

IN TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

Padmini Sengupta

Soon after the advent of Indian Independence a government officer remarked: "I have never seen so many girls working in offices as there are today. One meets them everywhere and in every capacity. The city is full of happy middle-class working girls." Indeed, one has merely to stand in a busy area in any of the great cities of India when offices close and open to see the number of Indian women working in secretarial and administrative capacities or as stenographers, clerks, telephone girls, sales-women and receptionists, to mention but a few new careers. This spontaneous raising of the economic status of Indian middle-class women is something which is characteristic of this country as a free nation. Women in the labouring classes have been working for a number of years in village industries and mines and as domestic servants; but the upsurge of the middle income groups of women towords gaining economic independence is something new and encouraging. It goes to prove that no country can be free unless its women are also free. Perhaps no other nation has testified to this fact as much as India has since its independence in 1947.

Among the masses, women have always had to earn their livelihood. Their existence has been one of toil and trouble these many years; but today, the injustices done to women workers are fully realized and their legal and social status is being raised as fast as possible.

AGRICULTURE

Women in the villages have always taken part in agricultural labour, either on their own property or as hired workers, both part-time and full-time. Women are compelled to work at this economic level in order to save labour costs and supplement the slender earnings of the men. They toil on their

own small holdings or farms because the help of all able-bodied members of a family is needed to avoid outside labour being employed. The proportion of female labour among agricultural wage earners varies appreciably from State to State. For example, in 1953, women formed 34.6%, 30.7% and 30% of the total, respectively, in Madhya Pradesh, Madras and Hyderabad, while in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh the proportion did not reach 10%. It varied between 2.33% and 8.18% around Delhi and in Manipur and Bilaspur.

The following statistics are enlightening, for they show the importance of women in the economy of village homes.

Population according to Livelihood Categories
Census of India, 1951

	Population (in millions)		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*
I. *Agricultural*			
(a) Cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned and their dependents	85·1	82·2	167·3
(b) Cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependents	16·2	15·4	31·6
(c) Cultivating labourers and their dependents	22·4	22·4	44·8
(d) Non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent-receivers and their dependents ..	2 4	2·9	5·3
II. *Non-Agricultural*			
(a) Production other than cultivation ..	20·0	17·6	37·6
(b) Commerce	11·2	10·1	21·3
(c) Transport	3·1	2·5	5·6
(d) Other services and miscellaneous sources ..	22·7	20·3	43·0

NOTE: Excluding 13·5 million persons in the Punjab for whom details are not available.

It is important to note that the raising of social standards has a tendency to make village women work less in the fields, but landless women peasant often have themselves hired out to work. Women do not undertake the heavier tasks of ploughing but take an important part in harvesting, weeding, planting, threshing, manuring and field irrigation, and also at times in terracing. The tasks are heavy, and men and women work side by side; but industrialization tends to draw workers away from the villages. Increased knowledge of modern agricultural methods is necessary, and indeed the

Five Year Plans are catering for this, making provision for the urgent need to improve technical knowledge and keeping women in the rural areas instead of allowing them to migrate to industrial centres.

During 1951-56 a sum of Rs. 361 crores was set aside for agriculture and community development apart from a large allocation for irrigation. This gave a tremendous impetus to development activities in the rural areas and especially to agriculture. The rural population comprises about 70% of the total population of India, which according to the 1951 census was 356 million. The tremendous importance of this form of livelihood can therefore be guessed from the millions who work on the land, of whom women form a large percentage.

INDUSTRY

In 1950, the number of women working in factories numbered 280,947, forming 11.33% of the total labour force of 2,479,379. There were also 479,983 women working on plantations, forming 43.53% of a total force of 1,102,686. The following seven occupations employed the largest number of women that year :

Tea plantations	397,546	Women
Textile industries	102,033	"
Coffee plantations	70,910	"
Food (except beverages) factories	58,048	"
Coal mining	57,390	"
Tobacco factories	43,033	"
Gins and presses	35,019	"

Women are also found in large numbers in manganese mining (45.9% of the total force), iron ore mining (34.9%), rubber plantations (24%), non-metallic mineral products factories (14.27%), chemical and chemical products factories (13.36%) and in many other industrial categories. Women work in the mines of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa, in the plantations of Assam, West Bengal, Madras, Kerala and Mysore, and in factories in all the big cities. There is the largest percentage of working women in Madras

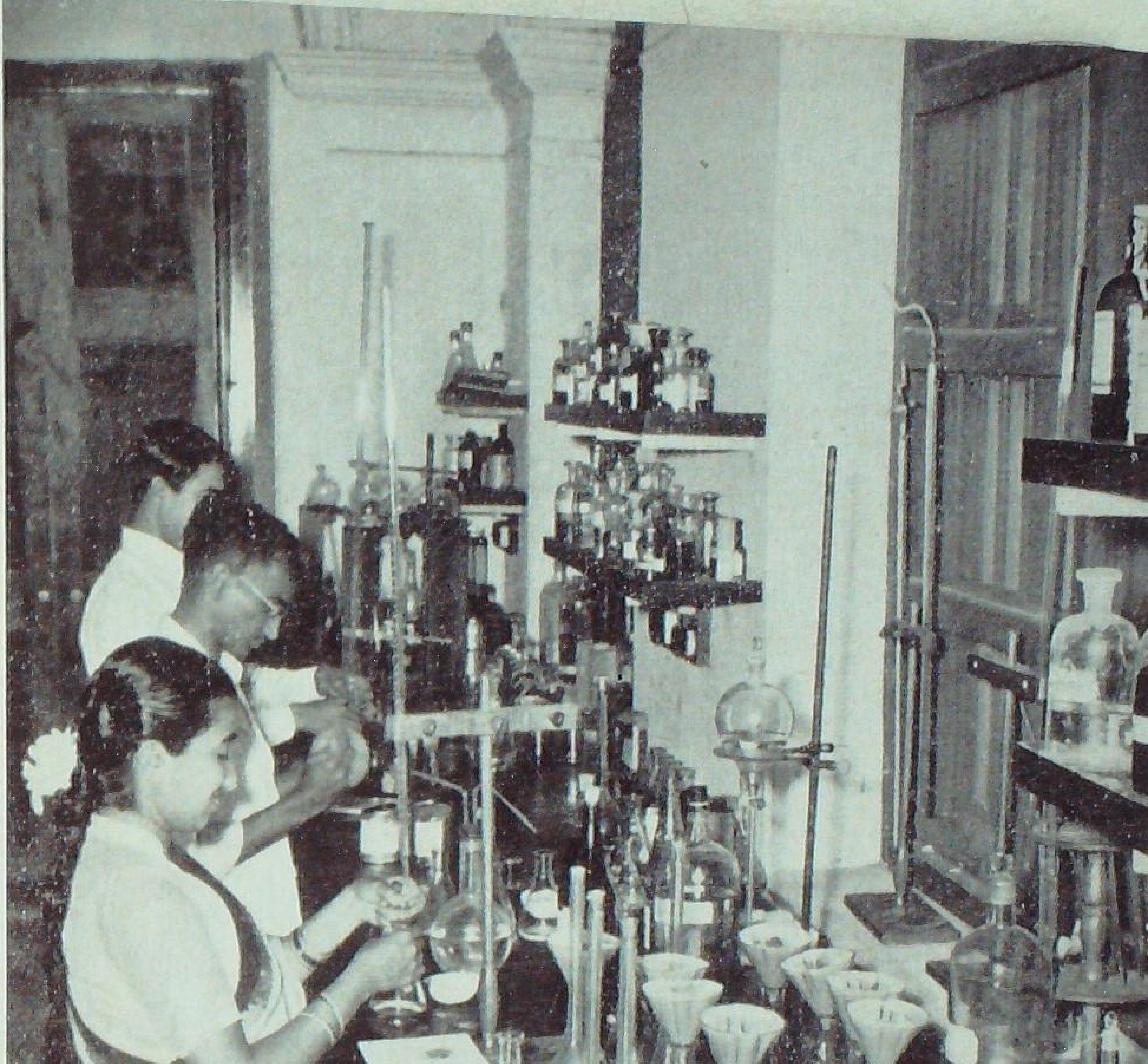
Miss Sarla Khanna, Deputy Commissioner, Simla, on agricultural inspection work

Dr. Pawah, Magistrate in a Juvenile Court

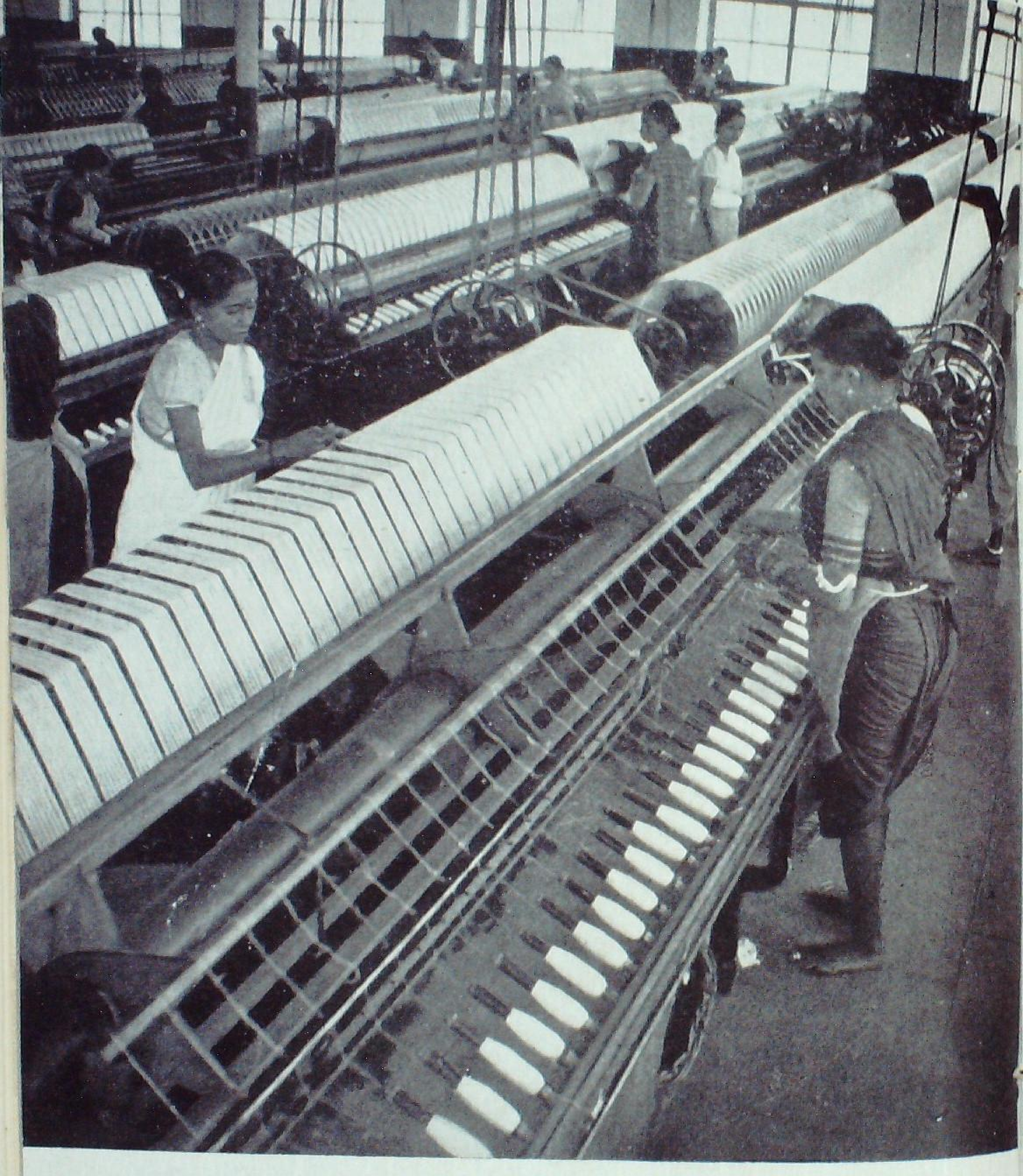
Air hostesses of Air-India International and the Indian Airlines

(Opposite page) Kumari P. Kamala Devi, graduate in tele-communications, in the control room of All India Radio

The Northern Railway Booking Office during rush hour



A laboratory of the Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore



The Reeling Department in a Bombay textile mill

The Indian Telephone Factory, Bangalore

Stengun training for women police, Delhi

Science students at the Muslim University Women's College, Aligarh

A Woman Surgeon operates

(25.48%), Orissa coming next with 24.11% and Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Ajmer, Bombay and West Bengal following in that order.

Many legislative and other measures have been taken since 1947 for the protection of women workers. They include :

(1) The Factories Act (1948), which limits women to nine hours' work per day and confines the work period between 7 a.m. and 6. p.m. in factories, mines and plantations, unless relaxation is allowed by the State or Central Governments, and the Mines Act (1951), which prohibits women working underground. During the War this rule was relaxed, though a previous Act forbade such employment of women.

(2) A law forbidding the lifting of heavy weights in excess of 65 lbs. per adult woman (45 lbs. for adolescents) and excluding women from employment in dangerous operations.

(3) Welfare facilities such as improved sanitation, maintenance of creches in factories employing more than 80 women or even where any women are employed (as in the Mines Act), and providing rest periods for mothers to feed their babies.

(4) Maternity benefits. These are now being absorbed in the Employees' State Insurance Scheme, which is gradually being spread all over India.

Legislation is protecting women in factories, mines and plantations. The conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization have inspired the Union Government to forge ahead with legal protection for women workers. The I. L. O. attitude to women's problems is to enable them to achieve full opportunity to develop their qualifications freely and to play a full and effective part in social and economic life". Its objectives are :

Full political and civil rights;
Full opportunity for education;
Full opportunity to work;
Remuneration without discrimination based on sex;

Legislative protection against physically harmful employment conditions and economic exploitation;
Legislative safeguards for motherhood; and
Freedom of association.

All these are being pursued by the Central and State Governments, including equal pay, though this is not yet a practical proposition in some industries. The wages of women workers are usually fixed at rates lower than those for men either because the relative value and nature of work are different or because historical developments and social and economic factors have generally made for the fixation of lower rates for women workers, irrespective of the nature of their work. Differences in wages, however, are tending to disappear or, at any rate, are being narrowed down due to the Minimum Wages Act, standardization of wages by Industrial Courts and Tribunals and the pressure of public opinion. Women workers are, therefore, by no means being forgotten, and every year sees an improvement in their conditions of living and working.

There is a tendency, however, for women in industries to be retrenched whereas such workers are rapidly increasing in other countries. Legislative measures which are meant to raise the working and living standards of women in India have in a sense turned the tables on those who would benefit by these laws and have been one of the causes of their retrenchment. Many employers prefer to employ men, who are cheaper as they do not entail the payment of maternity benefits and the need for supplying creches and other facilities. The hours of work for men also are not restricted. They can work after 7 p.m. and before 6 a.m. when urgency of work compels night shifts. It is, however, a serious problem that women are being retrenched, and this tendency should somehow be checked and womens' employment safeguarded.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

Women have always found an important place in domestic services and in small trades. An old census report says:

"Many women who have been returned as 'unemployed' are engaged in domestic duties such as cooking, grinding grain, drawing water and looking after children". A Memorandum submitted by the Women's Indian Association to the League of Nations in 1938 provided some statistics of women in small industries, in which they often exceeded men. The dairy industry, for instance, employed 514 women to 486 men in every 1,000, and those dealing with charcoal, cowdung and firewood numbered 557 women to 443 men. The ratio of women to men in the grain trade was 815 to 185.

Laundries, dyeing and cleaning, leather work and tailoring, to mention but a few, are industries in which women are interested. Nor must we forget the fish wife, the vegetable and flower vendors, the bangle-seller, the lace-maker, the potter and other women who toil for their living. It is interesting to note that in many trades, where men are the artisans, women attend ably to the business side of things. This is particularly true of the metal workers of Bombay, fishermen and dyers and other trade groups of traditional caste pattern like potters and leather workers. For all these categories of workers, as well as domestic servants, there are as yet no safeguards or protection in law.

It is heartening that a Bill is at present before Parliament to improve the lot of domestic servants. The Domestic Servants' Bill embodies an eight-hour working day, medical care, living quarters and a month's holiday with full pay. This legislation, if passed, will be in keeping with the Factories and Mines Acts, which have improved the lot of women workers in these fields.

The Five Year Plans, however, have many programmes for women employed in small trades. The first Five Year Plan aimed at improving manual husking, so as to obtain more rice and bran of pure quality by replacing the pounding method by stone *chakkis* (grindstones). The distribution of about 50,000 *chakkis* was subsidized in the rice-pounding areas over a period of four years. Rice mills of the huller type have gradually been eliminated. The Plan also provided for co-operatives of village leather workers. Municipalities and

public works departments have always employed women in the lower income categories.

DISCRIMINATION ENDED

While women have been working for years in agriculture and industry, independent India has with one stroke of the pen, so to speak, removed discrimination against women of the lower and higher middle-class groups who for one reason or another have been denied employment. All careers are now open to women, and it is up to them entirely to fit themselves for the opportunities created. Nor have middle-class girls been slow to seize their chances.

The Constitution promises social, economic and political justice to every citizen and also equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood. Equal pay for both men and women is assured. These clauses are not merely theoretical. They are practical propositions and have been successfully put to the test.

At the very dawn of free India, women were appointed to the highest posts. Sarojini Naidu was created a Governor, Vijayalakshmi Pandit an Ambassador and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur a Minister of Cabinet rank. In other professions so many women are now employed that it seems unbelievable that barely 25 years ago such a furore should have been created over Devika Rani, a niece of Rabindranath Tagore, entering the films, or Enakshi Bhavnani, a girl of high-born family, taking to this career. Pioneers in dancing, too, like Menaka and Rukmini Arundale, had to work hard to break down prejudices. They paved the way for the women of free India to take up these professions with honour.

EDUCATION

Teaching was one of the first professions open to middle-class Indian women. From 1830 onwards, the Government

began to think of women's education by encouraging girls to attend village schools, which had only been meant previously for boys. For years, however, though women began gradually to realize that teaching was a "respectable" occupation, the inadequacy of girls' schools and colleges did not provide enough scope for sufficient women to gain any definite form of economic independence. Bethune College was the first women's college employing women as teachers, Miss Kumodini Das being its first Indian woman Principal.

The Arya Samaj in North India, the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and the Christian missionaries gave a strong impetus to girls' education, thus automatically increasing the number of women teachers. Credit must be given to the dedicated work of Christian institutions, who were to a great extent responsible for the increase in women's education and for the teacher training services they initiated. The Government also began gradually to gain interest and women's schools and colleges were started in all parts of India, thus providing employment for women teachers. This profession was first open to women in 1837, and laid the foundation-stone for their economic freedom.

Pioneers in education who sponsored the cause of women's independence were numerous. Among them may be mentioned Pandita Ramabai, the first Indian intellectual to become a Christian, Ramabai Ranade, Lady Bose and her sister Smt. P. K. Ray, Sarladevi Chaudhurani, Miss Contractor and Miss Carpenter, Lady Harnam Singh, Smt. Parvati Chandrasekhar, Smt. Ruumaniamma, Smt. Kamala Satthianadhan, the first woman Editor of a journal and Miss Regina Guha, whose celebrated legal action in 1922 paved the way, a year later, for women to practise law. Miss Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to benefit by this change, while Mithan Tata Lam was the first woman barrister. Other names are those of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, first woman member of the Madras Legislature, Sister Subhalakshmi and Smt. Sundari Hensman.

The firs woman M. A. in India was Chandramukhi Bose of Bengal, the first Inspectress of Schools. One who toured

extensively, thus paving the way for women to travel freely in connection with their work, was Smt. Sreenivas, a Christian widow.

Today there are two women Vice-Chancellors–Smt. Hansa Mehta of Baroda University and Smt. Sarada Mehta of the Indian Women's University, Poona–while Smt. S. Parthasarathy is Principal of a men's college in Madras. All the Universities are open to women. In 1948-49 there were 18,804 educational institutions for girls, and about 107,270 women were employed in the educational services and research in 1954-55.

In spite of the tremendous progress made in opening up educational avenues for women, the problems of education and the teaching profession are manifold and difficult to overcome. The main difficulty is the inadequacy of existing educational facilities, which has led to serious neglect of women's education. A large proportion of teachers, too, are untrained.

In the first and second Five Year Plans these problems are being tackled efficiently and it is hoped that educational institutions will have greatly increased in number, thereby providing employment to more teachers. The stress on social and nursery education will also increase the number of women employees in the educational sphere. Many committees and commissions have placed their recommendations before the Education Ministry, stressing the need for more professors, readers, lecturers and instructors on better salary scales.

In present-day India, education attracts more women than any other liberal profession. In March 1950, of the 512,000 primary school-teachers (excluding those in charge of primary classes attached to secondary schools) almost 15.4% were women. During the year 1949-50 there were in secondary schools (including the attached primary classes) 31,000 women teachers (approximately 16% of the toal number). In the same year, there were 3,918 women (14% of the total number of educational workers) among teachers in the various professional and technical training institutions throughout India, and 1,700 women (8.9% of the total) on the staffs of various University Faculties and general colleges.

MEDICAL PROFESSION

The healing professions were frowned on by austere parents of the previous generations. To encourage women to take up these professions, many medical institutions now reserve places for girls, but there is still a great shortage of doctors and nurses in the country. This is clearly seen from the table below :

Medical Personnel	*Proportion of medical personnel in population*	
	India	*U. K.*
1 Doctor	6,300	1,000
1 Nurse	43,000	300
1 Health Visitor	400,000	4,710
1 Midwife	60,000	618

In the Armed Forces Medical Services, there are 62 doctors of the officer grade. Major D'Souza is an M.R.C.P. London and a specialist. There are three other women Majors, 46 Captains and 12 Lieutenants. On the nursing side, Matron O.D. Mylan holds a rank equivalent to Colonel, while there are 7 Matrons with ranks equivalent to Lt.-Colonel.

During the first Plan, there was an increase in civilian nurses by 35·6% and 37·3% in the case of midwives. The country does, however, need very many more doctors in order to satisfy minimum health standards. Every effort is being made by the Government to extend training facilities for doctors, nurses, midwives and *dais* (unqualified midwives). Among the last named, many who have practised without any training in villages and slums are gradually being taught hygiene and up-to-date methods.

There are more than 77,000 women in the medical and health services of the country at present. The first Indian woman to take an M. D. abroad was Dr. Dossibai Dadabhoy, M.D. of London, who established a maternity hospital years ago in Bombay and is still running it efficiently. Virginia Mary Mitra was, however, the first woman M. D. in the country.

The Christian Medical Colleges of Ludhiana in the Punjab and Vellore, South India, have turned out many trained personnel of the highest calibre.

The College of Nursing in Delhi is the first of its kind in India. There are also many training centres for midwives, *dais* and health visitors. The low salaries of nurses and even doctors, unsatisfactory housing conditions and long working hours have repelled girls from these noble professions. Incentives must indeed be increased generously before the required number of women will be forthcoming to fulfil the needs of the country. There is no doubt, however, that the number of girls wanting training is in excess of the facilities available.

SERVICES

There are so many women working as stenographers and secretaries that statistics are difficult to compile. The economic conditions of women in the middle classes are such that it is almost essential for women to work, either when married to supplement the family income or to earn a living as unmarried girls. While it is difficult to assemble any statistics on the number of women secretaries and stenographers, not to speak of typists and receptionists and telephone operators, the Central Government alone employs 20,668 women, the statistics of a few Ministries being listed in the table below:

Railways	8,800
Ministry of Defence	3,000
Ministry of Production	1,072
Ministry of External Affairs	701
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	225
Ministry of Food and Agriculture	206

Thirty women are in highly placed Secretariat posts. The Ministry of Transport is in the strange position of employing more women than men in the Tourist Department! Four senior women officers manage the four regional offices, and seven the smaller regional offices while Miss B. Krishnaswamy has been appointed Director of the Indian Tourist Office in London.

Twenty-four women have been registered as tourist guides and given certificates after a course of training. A pioneer

in tourist guide work with a well-knwon travel agency has been Comola Paranjoti, who has conducted all-India tours of large parties like the World University Service cultural groups from Argentina and France and groups from ECAFE as well as UNESCO delegates in 1956. In 1952, Escorts Ltd., Delhi, was started by Smt. Shukla as a conducted tour service in Delhi and Agra.

The census of 1951 revealed that 5 million women in India are self-supporting, of whom 800,000 are engaged in production and half a million in commerce. These figures are now much larger, a most vivid example being furnished by the phenomenal response to a recent advertisement for the post of woman caretaker in a municipal school. One thousand applications were received.

In the field of architecture , Smt. Bakshi is Assistant Director in the National Buildings Organization, while Smt. Chaudhury, among others, assisted the well-known architects Corbusier and Janeret in building the new Capital of the Punjab at Chandigarh.

In the Delhi Polytechnic there are two women architects : one is Head of the Department of Architecture and the other a lecturer. Ila Majumdar, also a lecturer in the Polytechnic, is India's first mechanical engineer. She graduated from the College of Engineering near Calcutta and was appointed assistant foreman in the Ordnance Factory at Dehra Dun in 1954. After six months Miss Majumdar was selected by the Union Public Service Commission as lecturer in the Polytechnic. There are also a few women architects in private firms such as Smt. Shaukat Rai, who is in partnership in her husband's firm, and Smt. Mistry, who took over her father's firm, Bedwar and Mistry, in Bombay.

Smt. Usha Ram Sainani must be the only woman hydraulic engineer in India. She was recently sent to the U.S.A. by the Ministry of Irrigation and Power to study flood control measures. Three women recently graduated in Engineering from Roorkee College, and there are two practising woman engineers in Madras.

A well-known engineer, Anant Pandya, was determined to make wife, Lilly, an engineer. After his death Lilly became

a partner in his firm. She is also an ardent social worker. She has inaugurated a trust in her husband's name granting scholarships for students wishing to carry on post-graduate work in engineering.

Smt. Sumatiben Morarji, Director of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company for some years, has recently been elected President of the Indian National Steamship Owners Association, a body representing Indian shipowners. This is the first time that a woman has occupied this office and it is possible that few women anywhere in the world have been elected to this sort of position.

In the Planning Commission, apart from Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, who was its first woman member, the Assistant Chief Social Welfare Officer is a woman, Parijatam Naidu. There are also several women research officers.

In almost all services equal pay for men and women is aimed at, and there is a steady increase in the employment of women.

Employment exchanges, set up by the Directorate General of Resettlement and Employment, afford opportunities for women to seek employment. The number of women applicants on the live registers of the exchanges at the end of January 1957 was as follows:

Secretaries	3
Receptionists	22
Telephone Operators	248
Clerks	11,276
Typists	1,117
Stenographers	158
Others	27,229

The number of women who applied for assistance from the employment exchanges rose from 1,500 in 1948 to 4,500 in 1951 and has now reached 40,000. This shows the trend of employment of women and the rapidity with which they are seeking to gain economic independence.

The International Labour Review in 1953 said:

> "Impoverishment of the middle classes plays a big part in compelling girls with an elementary, or even advanced, education to seek office work. Thus the shortage of personnel, the continued trend towards emancipation of women and the decline in living standards among certain classes have combined to create what is perhaps one of the most striking features of the development of labour among women in the majority of Asian countries."

The Review added :

> "The extent to which women workers are recruited to the employment exchanges is as yet limited. While comparatively large numbers are registered and placed in some States, *e. g.*, Madras and Bombay, the number is small in other States.
>
> Shortages of women applicants are reported in the occupations of nurses, *ayahs*, midwives, doctors, stenographers and trained teachers. There is a surplus of women applicants for clerical posts.
>
> "One of the problems facing the exchanges in finding employment for women registrants is that they are not willing to accept employment away from their homes. Many of them are untraind or insufficiently trained as teachers or nurses. Mobility is very limited, and the absence of suitable housing facilities at places where jobs are available is the most important single factor which limits mobility. Unattractive wages and conditions of service are also factors which prevent women from accepting employment in distant places. It is reported by the exchanges that women are not willing to accept employment in rural areas. Some of the employers are reluctant to employ women as it involves, in their view, making some special arrangements exclusively for them"

WRITING AND JOURNALISM

Women writers and journalists were almost non-existent about three decades ago. I remember working as a paid apprentice in the *Hindu* office in 1932 and being one of the first women to work in a newspaper office. Later, when I took up the editorship of a magazine in Calcutta in 1934, I was among the first women to launch out as a journalist, being employed by a proprietor to run a paper. There were, of course, journals for women such as the *Indian Ladies Magazine*, started as early as 1901 by Kamala Satthianadhan in Madras. There were the *Sri Dharma* and many others, as well as papers in the Indian languages, but many of these were not business ventures and were merely run by philanthropic women or by institutions to push the cause of women's emancipation. In the early days, Ela Sen was prominent in journalism, particularly as her subjects were generally political. In subsequent years, she not only wrote a number of books but made a name for herself in the leading papers in England. Another political writer and commentator abroad has been Princess Indira of Kapurthala, whose commentary on Parliamentary Affairs has been a regular feature of the B.B.C. for years.

Today, women's journals such as *Trend*, *Eve's Weekly* and others are run by women in offices which employ a large number of girls in the various departments. Most papers have a women's section edited by women, and there are many women reporters on daily papers and feature editors or competent women in various capacities in almost all the modern journals. Some are even business managers.

The first newspaper syndicate was started by Smt. Kusum Nair and her husband who were both journalists. They also started a large paper mill for the manufacture of newsprint.

One of the most successful women in business is the owner of the Signet Press in Calcutta, who built the whole enterprise herself after the death of her husband. Nilima Devi is a Bengali woman of great gifts whose publishing firm printed the first Indian edition of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India.* The firm has received many awards in recent years for its publications.

There are innumerable writers, of course, both in English and in the Indian languages who make a living through writing books, text-books, pamphlets and as free-lancers in journalism and radio. Advertising is also a popular career in modern India, and highly paid women are appointed by agencies and papers proving themselves very gifted in art and lay-out work and advertising copy. In one large Bombay firm, three-quarters of the personnel are women, while the highly paid Accounts Executive is Nooru Swaminathan, sister of Chief Justice Chagla.

BUSINESS

Women in business are not a small number, as will be seen from the statistics given in the Appendix. There are many girls who are enterprising enough to start shops, tailoring concerns, auction rooms and countless other enterprises. Many women are running canteens and taking up work as managers and directors of shops either run by the Government or privately, and as house-keepers in hotels.

At the Industries Fair held in Delhi in 1955, the two highest awards for the best pavilions were given to Smt. Pupul Jayakar for the display in the Handloom Pavilion and Miss Soona Batliwala for the Tata Industries Pavilion. Pupul Jayakar is an Honorary Director of the All-India Handloom Board of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as Director of the National Small Industries Corporation and the Bombay State Industrial Co-operative Association. In addition, she is Export Marketing Adviser and recently arranged the biggest promotional exhibition of handlooms ever held abroad. She assisted in the publication of *Textiles and Ornaments of India* after the Exhibition of that name arranged by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Other women in the Handloom Board are Miss Shona Ray, who is weaver-designer in the Design Centre of the Handloom Board, Bombay, Miss Nalini Chaubal, Deputy Director, Designs, and Dr. Sita Pooiah, Assistant Manager of the Handloom Emporium.

In the field of handicrafts, it may be said that the tremendous revival of dying crafts and their skilful marketing at home and abroad has been the work almost entirely of women. In 1948 Smt. B. K. Nehru organized handicrafts centres under the Ministry of Rehabilitation, and the sales aspect was started later in the year with a small emporium. This began to grow and in 1951 the group came into the Indian Co-operative Union under the chairmanship of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. The Cottage Industries Emporium in New Delhi gradually became a tourists' "must" when visiting the Capital. In 1952 the Export Section was built up under the direction of Smt. Prem Bery, and today this great enterprise not only runs a Rs. 20-lakh business in the Emporium itself, which is managed by Smt. Vir Singh and Smt. Khanna and is staffed almost entirely by women in the sales department, but arranges exhibitions of handicrafts abroad and handles a growing export trade. The budget of the Handicrafts Board runs to Rs. 8 crores. There are seven women Executive Members of the Board of the Indian Co-operative Union, of which a very prominent worker is Smt. Shiva Rau.

Recently four regional design centres and twelve pilot centres for production have been set up. Jeslin Chatterjee is the marketing analyst of the Delhi centre, Krishna Pandit runs the production centre of Indian dolls, Parwati Natesan handles the production centre of Kanchipuram *saris* and Bina Das the Calcutta design centre.

Textile mills have also not been slow in using the creative faculties of women for textile designing. On the staff of the Delhi Cloth Mills, Nandita Kripalani was responsible for many charming new designs in *saris*, furnishing materials and other textiles. She now works in the Design Department of the Indian Co-operative Union. In another field, Miss Camer Ahmad occupies the responsible post of Personnel Officer in the Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Company.

The firm of Tata has had a long record of progressive business ideas. As long ago as 1910, Sir Dorab Tata, Chairman of the Company, had as his Secretary Miss J. M. Cursetjee, who rose so high that she retired in 1950 as Secretary to the Tata Iron and Steel Company. Then there was Gul Cowasjee, who for 18 years was Legal Assistant to Tata Sons, and Piloo Vesugar, who was Director of the J. N. Tata Education Endowment Fund for 15 years. Soona Batliwala, who joined Tatas in 1931, is now Chief Publicity Officer of the Tata Oil Mills and a keen business woman who has done much to promote the sale of soaps, oils and perfumes produced by this company.

While there are many women in responsible posts in business in various parts of India, two more examples may be quoted here. One is a Muslim woman of outstanding ability, who has run the family firm of Sultan Padamsee, a ceramics and glass concern, since 1930. Another is Smt. K. H. Shroff, a Parsi, who carries on a big wholesale and retail fish business as well as an important exchange business. in foreign currency.

Lilavati Munshi is the wife of a former Governor of U. P., who was Food Minister during a very difficult period. Food was short and foreign exchange was being conserved as tightly as possible. Smt. Munshi therefore started a series of restaurants, run by the Women's Food Council, called "Annapoorna".

They supplied a wholesome meal, Indian style, for eight to 12 annas, not containing any essential foodgrains. These restaurants soon became so popular—for a good meal could not be obtained anywhere else at that price—that the Women's Food Council began to cater on railways and to establish additional restaurants all over the country.

Another well-known woman in the business world is Sheel Kapur, who works in the International Wool Secretariat as Publicity Assistant and Lecturer. She became Publicity Officer in charge of Features and Fashions in 1953, and the excellent exhibitions organized in various parts of India by her go to prove how competent and capable women can be. She works in various capacities from public relations to journalism and fashion designing and she has certainly brought woollens to the notice of people despite India's long hot weather.

Karthika Nair from Kerala helps to run a successful pharmaceutical business in Bombay in partnership with her husband. Her business does not keep her from running a happy home. She is the mother of two daughters, and also indulges in hobbies such as poultry-keeping. In fact she proves that a woman can find a great deal to do in 24 hours. Veena Purohit is a renowned hair stylist and is well-known for her Indian coiffures.

These are random examples of the range of women's careers today.

BROADCASTING

In the field of broadcasting there are innumerable women who have worked and are working as feature and script writers, in dramatics and music, as Heads of Sections such as music and talks as well as on the technical side in the studio and control room. Some are even engineers, such as Miss P. Kamaldevi who graduated from the Engineering College, Madras, in tele-communications. The Wireless Maintenance Engineer of the Calcutta transmitter is Smt. Keshavan, wife of the Director of the National Library.

Mehra Masani entered radio in 1942, rose rapidly to Station Directorship in Peshawar and since 1951 has held the

very responsible post of Director, External Services of A.I.R. She controls a network that functions in 23 languages and is heard all over the world.

Miss Sen Gupta has been posted in charge of the Simla Station.

Roshan Menon has been a regular news-caster whose golden voice is recognized by millions, and dozens of other girls function as announcers and feature writers on the national network and external services. Balwant Kaur Sekhon has become famous under the affectionate title of "Rani".

FOREIGN POSTS AND AIR HOSTESSES

Among popular posts abroad are such attractive careers as the U. N. Guided Tour Service, and work in the offices of the U. N. O., including UNESCO and UNICEF. Indian girls are taking full advantage of these opportunities. Indian air hostesses are rapidly increasing in number. In 1954 one of them, Gloria Berry, lost her life in the tragic sabotage case involving the Air-India International Constellation, *Kashmir Princess.* She died a heroine's death and was posthumously decorated for gallantry.

In the field of aviation, Prema Mathur has won an international award and many air races in India. Her application for a post of pilot in civil aviation was turned down on the ground that the public was not as yet sufficiently prepared to trust a woman pilot ! Mr. Birla, the well-known financier, however, trusts her enough to employ her as his personal pilot. Another young aviator, Miss Banerjee, is determined to enter the Air Force and has achieved her pilot's licence, navigator's licence and radio licence.

ADMINISTRATION

India has advanced well on the road towards economic independence for women. In this, the most welcome development is the fact that several women have been chosen for

high posts in the Central and State Ministries. The Administrative Services are now open to women and they can enter any career through competitive examinations. There are 7 women in the I.A.S., 6 in the Foreign Service, a Deputy Commissioner in Simla, Miss Khanna, and 5 Deputy Secretaries in the Central Secretariat.

Smt. Lakshmi Menon, who is now a Deputy Minister, recently demanded that out of the 12 million employment opportunities expected to be provided in the second Five Year Plan women should be allotted 4 million.

Smt. Violet Alva has been appointed Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Home affairs.

Before the new Ministries were formed recently, there were three women Ministers at the Centre and in the States and five Deputy Ministers. There were 43 women in the Houses of Parliament and 102 in the Legislative Assemblies and Councils of State. In the original Constituent Assembly there had been 11 women members. In the 1957 elections, out of 45 candidates put up for the Lok Sabha, 27 were elected. There are 20 in the Rajya Sabha, while out of 342 standing for the State Assemblies, 195 were returned.

Social services are opening up new fields which may go a long way towards solving the unemployment problems of women. The lower middle classes are being trained as organizers and midwives for the community development blocks which are forming a network all over India. The Central Social Welfare Board, guided by Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, first woman member of the National Planning Commission, alone will open up untold opportunities for village-level organizers, midwives, secretaries, social workers and urban industrial workers.

Among women in administrative posts are Leela Wagle Dhume (Deputy Secretary, Home Ministry), Smt. E. B. Joshi (Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education), Smt. Muriel Wasi, Miss Narsian, Smt. V. Mulay and Smt. Kapila Vatsayan (Assistant Educational Advisers), Leilamani Naidu (Deputy Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs), and Prema Joshi (Commerce). Bina Chatterjee (Public Service Commission)

was part-time keeper of the Indian National Archives and the only woman who, in the 40 years' existence of the International Federation of University Women, has been awarded two international fellowships in succession in open competition with representatives of 53 countries.

Dr. (Miss) E. K. Najakiamma has been an efficient Director of the Botanical Survey of India in Calcutta. Smt. Mitra is a well-known archaeologist. In the field of sociology, Dr. Iravati Karve has achieved world recognition. She has also collaborated with the Ford Foundation in work on social anthropology.

In the field of foreign languages women have again contributed something new. During the State visits of the Russian leaders, Mr. Bulganin and Mr. Khrushchev, and that of the Shah of Iran, a young woman, Amina Ahmad, handled the difficult task of translation during both tours with the confidence of a veteran. Equally proficient in English, Russian, Persian, Urdu and Hindi, Amina did direct translations of the speeches of these leaders without notes and almost invariably without prior knowledge of the speech—a tremendous responsiblity, since her translations were almost immediately flashed round the world.

During the official visit of Dr. Maza, President of the U.N., and also that of the President of Syria, another young woman handled the difficult task of translator with quiet efficiency. Veena Shah also has the distinction of .being the only Indian girl to have worked as an official U. N. translator, a task that requires great skill, stamina and knowledge.

Now that political and social freedom have been granted so liberally to our women, and training schemes and wider educational opportunities initiated, there can be no doubt that the promise in the Indian Constitution that "no citizen shall on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them be ineligible for or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the State" has already been fully realized. Mahatma Gandhi declared some years ago that the salvation of women lay in their own hands; but it has required a free nation to give Indian women the opportunities they have so richly deserved.

APPENDIX

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT

From the Times of India Year Book 1957

Industry	Total	Employers	Employees	Independent Workers
Stock Raising	70,178	1,813	10,743	57,622
Plantation Industries	403,971	1,107	382,605	20,259
Forestry and Woodcutting	38,043	357	5,748	31,938
Fishing	37,936	1,143	2,919	33,874
Mining and Quarrying	101,903	426	82,290	19,187
Coal Mining	63,063	114	61,383	1,566
Iron Ore Mining	2,877	6	2,789	82
Metal Mining (except Iron Ore)	7,247	23	4,440	2,784
Crude Petroleum & Natural Gas	200	13	50	137
Stone-quarrying, Clay and Sand Pits	15,718	198	5,981	9,539
Mica	6,632	19	4,896	1,717
Salt, Saltpetre & Saline Substances	2,742	26	883	1,833
Vegetable Oil & Dairy Products	38,452	1,354	4,782	32,316
Sugar Industries	7,417	200	2,813	4,404
Beverages	6,257	351	1,267	4,639
Tobacco	67,898	1,610	23,154	43,134
Cotton Textiles	227,994	4,719	79,968	143,307
Wearing Apparel and Made-up Textiles	51,225	1,592	6,003	43,630
Textile Industries otherwise unclassified	162,661	1,142	82,631	78,888
Leather, Leather Products and Footwear	36,780	898	4.143	31.739
Processing and Manufacture—				
Metals, Chemicals and products thereof	52,465	1,398	24,028	27,039

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT—Contd.

From the Times of India Year Book 1957

Industry	Total	Employers	Employees	Independent Workers
Manufacture of Metal Products, otherwise unclassified	27,997	817	5,143	22,037
Iron and Steel (Basic Manufacture)	7,479	71	6,533	875
Non-Ferrous Metals (Basic Manufacture)	246	7	76	163
Transport Equipment	3,720	108	2,717	895
Electrical Machinery and Apparatus	773	8	535	230
Machinery (other than Electric Machinery)	2,291	84	1,816	391
Basic Industrial Chemicals, Fertilizers and Power Alcohol	1,111	31	695	385
Medical and Pharmaceutical Preparations	715	17	481	217
Manufacturing Industries otherwise unclassified	22,173	692	5,198	16,283
Products of Petroleum and Coal	745	13	247	485
Bricks, Tiles and other Structural Clay Products	29,391	392	14,207	14,792
Cement, Pipes and other Cement Products	2,992	24	1,901	1,067
Non-metallic Mineral Products	59,991	1,429	5,258	53,304
Rubber Products	508	23	306	179
Wood and Wood Products other than Furniture and Fixtures	102,594	1,765	9,878	90,951
Furniture and Fixtures	2,494	159	478	1,857
Paper and Paper Products	2,075	55	1,256	764
Printing and Allied Industries	2,877	199	1,614	1,064
Construction and Utilities	269,811	2,072	114,658	153,081
Construction and Maintenance—Buildings	87,395	1,114	29,700	56,581
Construction and Maintenance—Roads, Bridges and other Transport Works	21,105	240	9,579	11,286
Construction and Maintenance—Telegraph and Telephone Lines	558	2	316	240
Construction and Maintenance Operations—Irrigation and other Agricultural Works	18,167	83	10,457	7,622

Works and Services—Electrical Power and Gas Supply	1,479	10	1,243	226
Works and Services—Domestic and Industrial Water Supply	14,861	293	5,357	9,211
Sanitary Works and Services (including Scavengers)	112,611	228	53,774	58,609
Commerce	561,975	30,732	48,228	482,955
Retail Trades otherwise unclassified	175,383	10,818	16,517	148,048
Retail Trade in Foodstuffs (including Beverages and Narcotics)	289,616	12,382	17,405	259,829
Retail Trade in fuel (including Petrol)	34,855	1,750	2,922	30,183
Retail Trade in Textile & Leather Goods	21,595	2,236	2,928	16,431
Wholesale Trade in Foodstuffs	11,776	822	1,387	9,567
Wholesale Trade in Commodities other than Foodstuffs	11,030	846	3,498	6,686
Real Estate	3,438	438	290	2,710
Insurance	1,847	107	836	904
Money-lending, Banking and other Financial Business	12,435	1,333	2,505	8,597
Transport Storage & Communications	62,964	3,606	36,557	22,801
Transport & Communications (otherwise unclassified) and incidental Services	2,986	68	1,738	1,540
Transport by Road	33,784	3,026	12,841	17,917
Transport by Water	5,349	377	2,959	2,013
Transport by Air	295	11	263	21
Railway Transport	14,459	96	13,200	1,163
Storage and Warehousing	938	28	771	139
Postal Services	2,047	—	2,043	4
Telegraph Services	416	—	415	1
Telephone Services	2,623	—	2,620	3
Wireless Service	67	—	67	—

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT—Contd.

From the Times of India Year Book 1957

Industry	Total	Employers	Employees	Independent Workers
Health, Education and Public Administration	272,483	2,608	234,129	35,746
Medical and Other Health Services	79,625	1,383	50,283	27,959
Educational Services and Research	118,491	1,221	109,634	7,636
Police (Other than Village Watchmen)	4,129	—	4,129	—
Village Officers and Servants (including Village Watchmen)	5,433	4	5,278	151
Employees of Municipalities and Local Boards (not persons classifiable under any other division)	25,839	—	25,839	—
Employees of State Govts. (not persons classifiable under any other division)	26,340	—	26,340	—
Employees of non-Indian Govts.	762	—	762	—
Services not elsewhere specified	1,451,528	13,755	644,870	792,903
Services otherwise unclassified	786,483	5,941	271,563	508,879
Domestic Services	391,075	906	324,300	65,869
Barbers and Beauty Shops	30,401	607	3,607	26,187
Laundries and Laundry Services	125,506	2,807	14,367	109,052
Hotels, Restaurants and Eating Houses	33,348	2,820	8,810	21,727
Recreation Services	32,780	445	5,027	27,308
Legal and Business Services	8,959	185	5,596	3,178
Arts, Letters and Journalism	1,720	112	464	1,144
Religious, Charitable and Welfare Services	41,256	652	11,145	29,459

WOMEN IN PLANNING

Durgabai Deshmukh

It was during the latter half of the 19th century that the nascent social reform movement made Indian women increasingly conscious of their rights and responsibilities. It soon came to be acknowledged that, unless the widespread handicaps suffered by women in all aspects of social life were removed, the progress of the nation as a whole towards freedom would itself be handicapped. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most immediate, and perhaps the most pervasive impact of the movement was felt in the status of women, in particular of child widows and women without social protection. Among the measures advocated and attempted during this period an important place was given to increased opportunities for the education of women, as previous chapters have shown.

In the decade since Independence, although a position of constitutional equality with men was acquired by Indian women with the coming into effect of the Constitution in 1950, inequality in other respects persists. However, in the first general election of 1952, women took full advantage of their new status, and in large number (45% of the voters were women) exercised their franchise. Other social disabilities have been successively eliminated with the passage of the Hindu Minority and Succession Act, Hindu Marriage Act and similar progressive legislative programmes.

The most significant problem facing free India, however, has been the constructive and creative use of political freedom as a means to economic betterment and progress, including, of course, the progress of women. The intimate relationship between economic progress and social reform has been recognized by the Government and accorded the status of a policy decision. The Planning Commission has acknowledged this, and social welfare service were allotted a prominent place in the First Five Year Plan. The constitution of the Central

Social Welfare Board and the provision of Rs. 4 crores for its work, very largely through non-official workers and institutions, during the first Plan period was the direct sequel. For the first time, too, the co-operation of voluntary non-official workers and institutions already in the field was regarded as essential. This consideration has been underlined and stressed during the last six years of the execution of the two Plans. In finalizing the proposals in the field of social welfare, commendable assistance has been received from the Women's Panel set up by the Planning Commission. When the history of National Planning in India comes to be written, the pioneer efforts of women in the formulating, processing and execution of the Plan Schemes will be there for all to see.

WOMEN'S SAVINGS CAMPAIGN

There are a number of activities for national welfare in which women have come forward to assist at every level. For instance, equipped with the experience of two or three decades of work in various types of social amelioration, a band of enthusiastic voluntary workers have dedicated themselves to strengthening governmental effort in securing funds for the implementation of our Plans. They carry to the women of the country the message of thrift and of investment of savings in the national cause. The Women's Savings Campaign, the organization and effective functioning of which received guidance from the late Smt. Hannah Sen, has trained hundreds of women workers in a new type of social activity. Despite initial handicaps and difficulties, an encouraging start has been made and large numbers of women are coming forward to offer their services in this cause. So far 188 women's welfare organizations, with 681 authorized workers, have been appointed as 'agents' of the Government. With experience, they have begun to prove more effective. Sales figures have steadily improved from nearly Rs. 95 lakhs in the year ending September 30, 1954, to over Rs. 112 lakhs the following year, more than Rs. 301 lakhs in the 11 months ending August 31, 1956,

and nearly Rs. 203 lakhs from October 1956 up to the end of May 1957.

In appreciation of these efforts the Ministry of Finance has decided to expand the scope of the campaign and to increase the number of its agent-units from 200 to 500. It will also replace single-member State Representatives by properly constituted State Boards, with a Central Board at the apex.

Another field of activity for voluntary women workers and welfare agencies is family planning and counselling. Family planning, with our present increase in birth-rate of 4 1/2 million per year, is an imperative need. We have to keep in mind not only the objective of promoting the welfare of the family but also another important aspect, that is, the need for achieving a rate of economic progress ensuring a 5 per cent increase per annum in our national income as envisaged in the second Plan, and a corresponding increase in the per capita income. Family planning, as an integral aspect of the social welfare scheme, was allocated Rs. 65 lakhs during the first Five Year Plan. In the second Plan the scheme will acquire an even more important place with the urgent necessity of limiting the population for the reasons just mentioned. A sum of Rs. 495 lakhs has hence been allocated. The Family Planning Association of India, with its outstanding women workers like Smt. Dhanvanti Rama Rau, has branches all over India. This and other women's welfare organizations have thus an excellent opportunity to make a worth-while contribution to the national welfare in the next few years. Two pilot projects have been launched with the help of the World Health Organization—one in urban Delhi and the other in the district town of Ramanathapuram in Madras State.

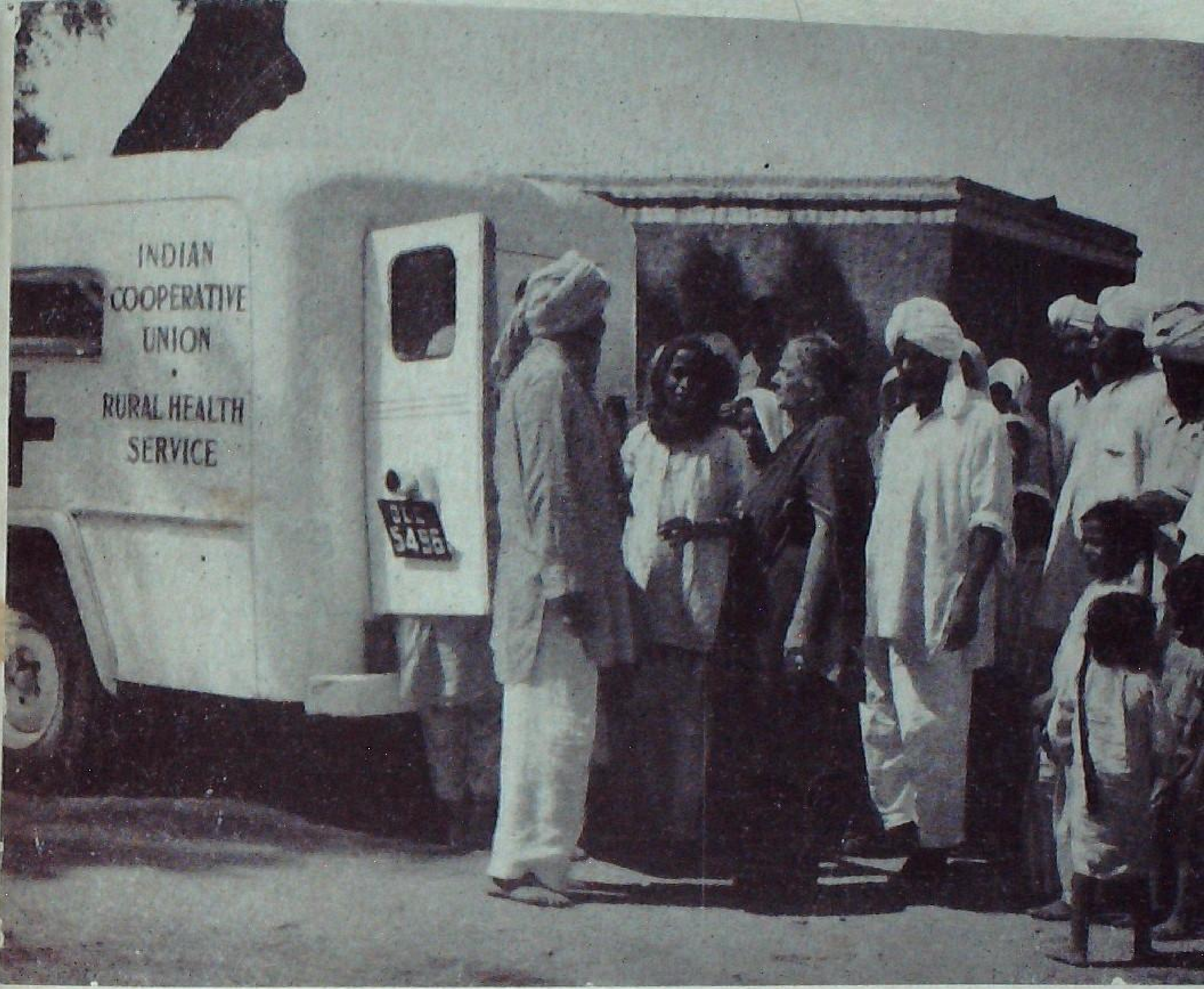
FAMILY WELFARE

Family welfare activity in the urban areas has, however, been undertaken in a more intensive manner. This brings us to one of the schemes which the Central Social Welfare

Board, in co-operation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has established for the gainful employment of women of the lower income brackets in urban areas. The execution of the scheme has been undertaken by the Central Social Welfare Board through a specially constituted managing committee consisting of women. After preliminary surveys and training are completed, supervised work in selected industries becomes available both in homes and nearby factories set up for the purpose. Those concerned with the manufacture of matches, *khadi*, hosiery, garments, etc., will receive some degree of priority. This is because their manufacturing processes are easily learnt and decentralized.

An experiment has already been made in the match industry and four units have started functioning in Delhi, Hyderabad, Poona and Vijayawada. In the match factory run by a co-operative society in Delhi, employment is being provided to 500 women, enabling them to earn a supplementary income by taking up tasks which can conveniently be accomplished at home. This experiment, conducted through a managing committee of women social workers and mainly benefitting women, reveals the potentialities of organized welfare schemes for families. The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry provides the necessary assistance in technical training, finance and marketing. Under the second Plan it is expected that there will be more such projects in different parts of the country.

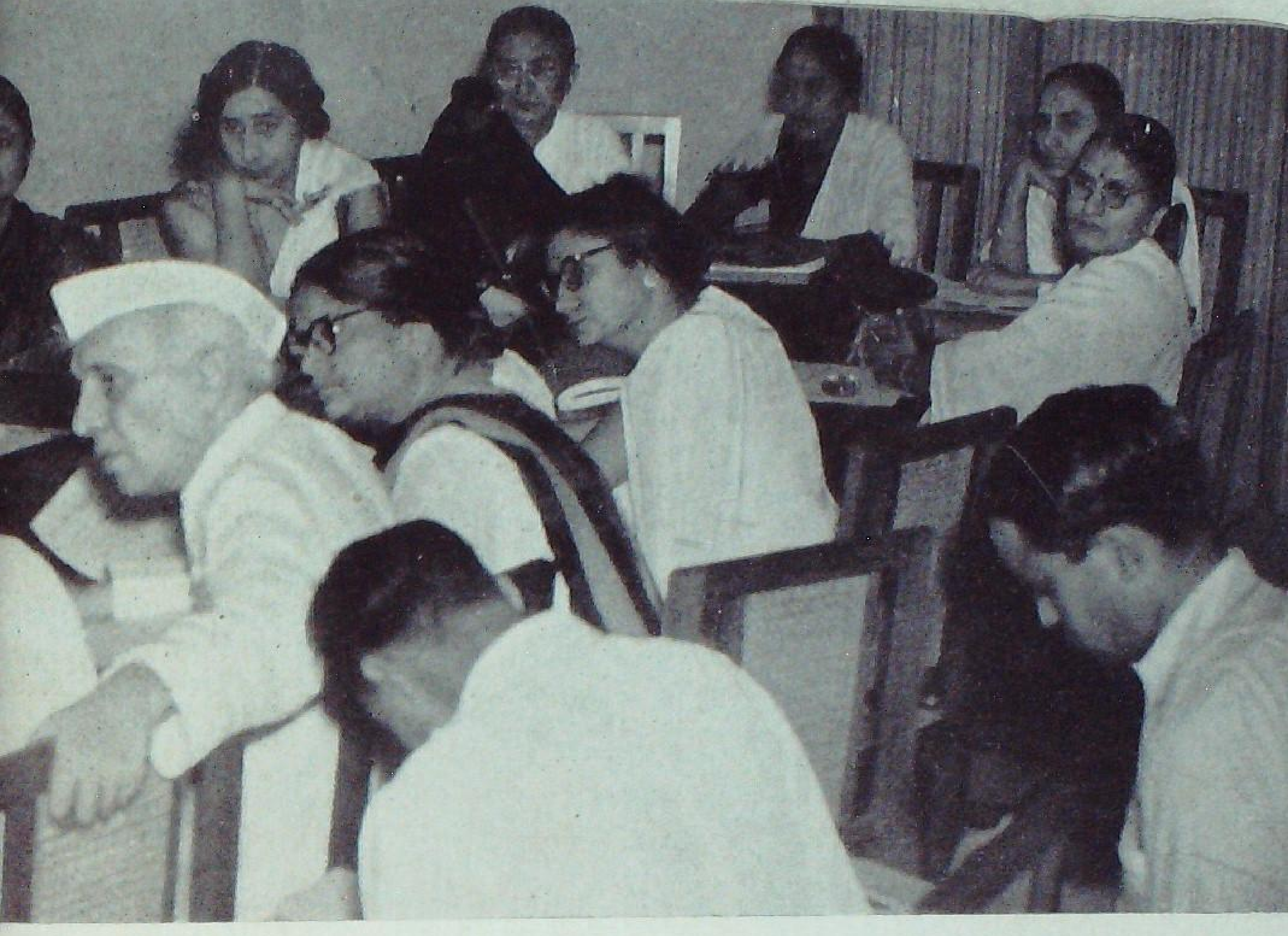
In activities connected with the provision of maternal and child welfare, and in their consistent and continuous implementation, women have a vital duty to perform. There are at present 3,168 maternity and child welfare centres, 26,000 midwives, 1,200 health visitors and about 22,000 nurses in India. These numbers are woefully inadequate and in both Plans a vast stepping-up in the number of personnel has been advocated. The Ministry of Health, apart from sponsoring courses of training for doctors, health visitors, midwives and maternity assistants, has also been assisting the Central Social Welfare Board in getting auxiliary health personnel trained for employment in its schemes.



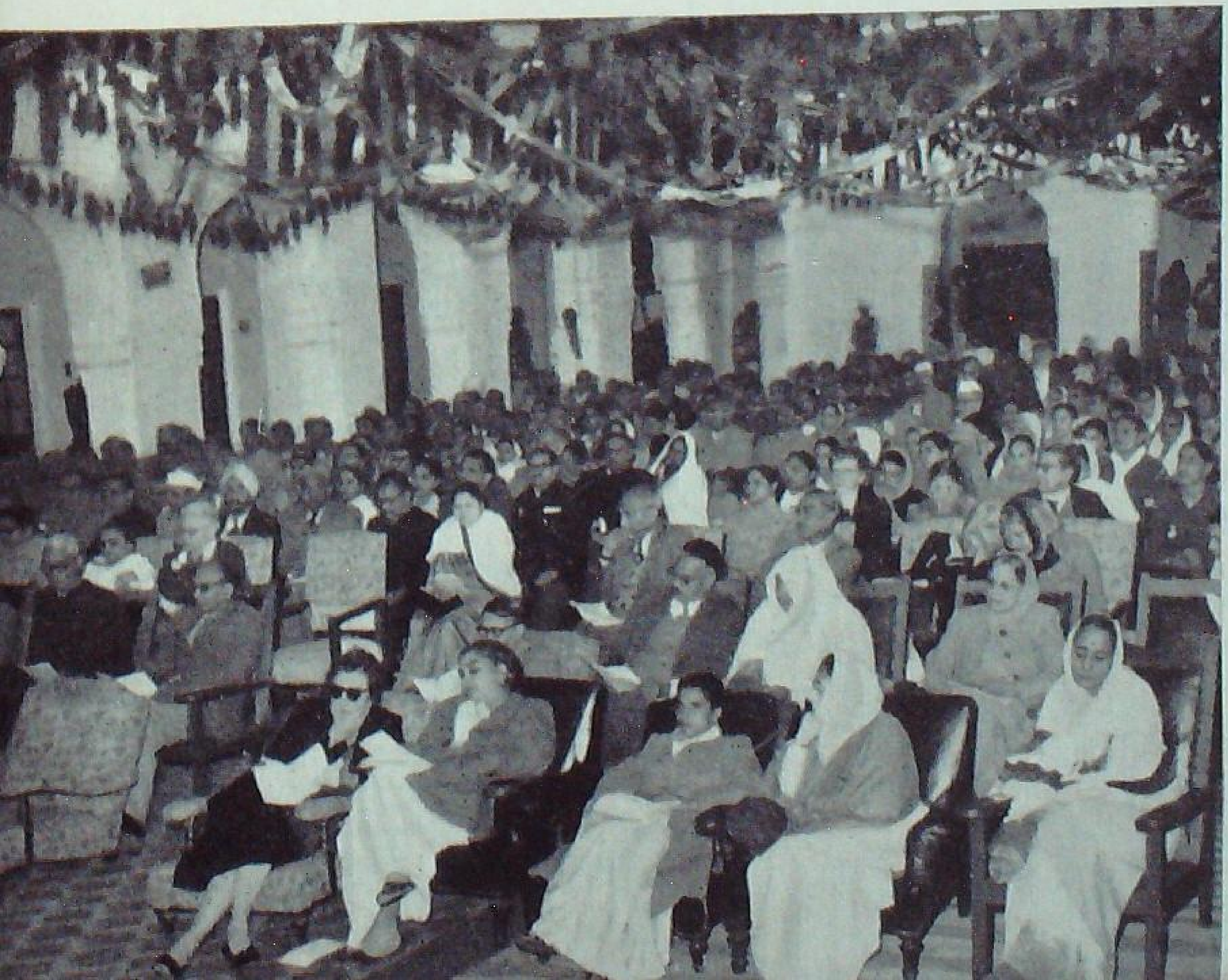
Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay discussing problems at a co-operative farm of the Indian Co-operative Union, of which she is President

Smt. Dhanvanti Rama Rau presiding over a Family Planning Conference

(Below) Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh delivering the presidential speech at the 5th Session of the All-India Moral & Social Hygiene Board held at Jaipur. Smt. Rameshwari Nehru and Smt. Shanti Kabir are also seen in the photograph



(Above) The Prime Minister and Finance Minister conferring with leaders of the Women's Small Savings Campaign. In the picture are Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, Smt. Hannah Sen (Chairman), Smt. Lakshmi Muzamdar, Smt. Gulistan Billimoria and other prominent workers



A Family Welfare Project—women workers in a match factory at Najafgarh, near Delhi

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Rural India having long been neglected, India's first Five Year Plan accorded high priority to the development of the rural areas through the Community Development Programme. Though the accent in this programme is on all-round development, its evolution has not been of a uniform pattern throughout the country. Improvement of agricultural practices and increasing the productivity of land received first attention under the scheme. But once the primary problem of increasing food production had been given due attention, greater efforts had to be directed toward the solution of social and cultural problems and meeting other needs of the rural population. The home, as the microcosm of national life, is coming into its own and with it has come the realization that women in the home should be educated.

The change in policy now only opens up enormous possibilities for producing a change in the complexion of village life as a whole but also for imparting a new perspective to rural development efforts. Social education of women is tantamount to education of two generations of a community, because educating the women amounts to educating the whole family and this work can most effectively and beneficially be carried out by women workers. A number of barriers and prejudices, social, communal and traditional, have to be broken before rural women can derive full benefit from family welfare schemes. This task is best accomplished by women workers. That is precisely what is being attempted in the 406 Welfare Extension Projects run by the Central Social Welfare Board.

During the first Five Year Plan, 1058 Community Development and National Extension Blocks were opened, and in the first year of the second Plan 740 more have been started. From April 1, 1957, the work of co-ordinating Community Development Blocks with Welfare Extension Projects with respect to services for women and children has been taken in hand and by the end of the second Plan period it is expected that the whole of rural India will be covered by the Community Development Programme.

K.G.N.M. TRUST

In this connection, the work of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, which is a pioneer in the field of welfare of women in the rural areas, deserves special mention because of the ready co-operation that the organizers of the Trust have extended in training a large number of women workers to serve in the rural areas.

The Programme of 1320 Welfare Extension Projects will require 6,600 *gram sevikas* (village workers) by the end of the second Plan. The Kasturba Trust started the training of the first group in 15 centres spread throughout the country from June 1955, and this training ended in May 1956. Five hundred were considered suitable for employment as *gram sevikas* in the various project centres. From June 1956, the training centres have been increased to 20, covering all the States, and 965 candidates are undergoing training in the second group. Then again, there is a large field in the sphere of promoting primary and social education among the village population and thus dispelling ignorance and introducing the light of literacy and knowledge into millions of village homes. In Community Development Blocks as well as Welfare Extension Projects a large number of social education centres have been opened, the essential difference between the two being that W. E. P. centres cater mainly to the needs of women. The work will be carried out in about 400,000 villages through women home economics organizers, social education organizers and village level workers.

AFTER-CARE SERVICES

A provision of approximately Rs. 10.5 crores has been made in the Central and State plans for After-care and Social and Moral Hygiene programmes. The recommendations of the two committees on After-Care Programmes and Social and Moral Hygiene set up by the Central Social Welfare Board were co-ordinated into an integrated programme by the Joint Implementation Committee comprising representatives of the Ministries concerned and the Central Social Welfare Board.

At the State level the scheme provides for five types of after-care and rehabilitation homes in each State. Three of the five types are meant for (a) women for whom a fairly long period of social and environmental adjustment will be necessary before any kind of vocational training can be given; (b) women discharged from correctional institutions and (c) short-term rehabilitation services for women discharged from non-correctional and care institutions.

As regards shelters, one type will cater to the needy groups requiring after-care and the other will be in the nature of reception centres, which will receive women initially rescued from moral danger. Production units, some of them having the capacity to cater for about 500 persons, are planned to be attached to the proposed after-care homes, of which there will be 80 at the State level. The district shelters will number about 330, one in each district.

I have received very valuable assistance from my colleagues, the members of the Central Social Welfare Board, in planning and executing these various schemes for social welfare. Smt. Indira Gandhi, Smt. Maniben Patel, the late Smt. Hannah Sen, Smt. Zarina Currimbhoy, Smt. Padmini Sengupta, Smt. Burgohain, Smt. Labonya Prova Dutt, Smt. Rama Rau and Smt. Achamma J. Matthai have all been actively associated with the working of the various schemes. Similarly, at the State level, a large number of women have been rendering notable service as Chairmen and members of the State Social Welfare Advisory Boards. At the district level, there are many more women who combine the functions of planning and implementation of the schemes for women's and children's welfare. It is a matter for legitimate satisfaction that the Central Social Welfare Board has been instrumental in bringing into existence this integrated network of organizational and individual effort on the part of many women social welfare workers.

CO-OPERATION, NOT COMPETITION

While the field for women's participation in the work of nation-building is admittedly vast, much depends on their

effective exploitation of possibilities. In this context, the spirit that should inspire them should be not one of competition but co-operation, not one of exclusivism but co-ordination, not merely one of a desire to exercise supervisory functions but also a willingness to render unselfish service whenever and wherever an opportunity presents itself. Leaving aside other fields, the field of social welfare and social service is itself so extensive that most of us can find through participation in it the joy and satisfaction of having done something really worth while, if we so desire.

All the activities listed above may not strictly fall within the scope of schemes under the Five Year Plan. Nevertheless, the Plan calls for a total effort at ameliorating the conditions of women and it is the sum total of activities in the various spheres, big and small, voluntary and professional, State-aided and privately undertaken, that ultimately matters. As the first Five Year Plan Report says: "in the context of the Five Year Plan it is especially pertinent to remember that the distinction between official and non-official workers is related to the content of their respective responsibilities, no longer to the objectives that they subserve."

Satisfactory results will, therefore, depend on the connected efforts of voluntary women's organizations, individual women workers and welfare personnel, and the activities of organizations like the Central Social Welfare Board. It can be confidently predicted that in course of time there will be many more and greater opportunities for women's participation in welfare schemes for women and other groups than the number of women likely to be forthcoming to participate in them. It is the responsibility of our women's organizations to ensure that, however large the demand for women workers, there will be no dearth of such workers to respond to the call, for this is, as the Prime Minister so rightly put it, "partnership in the great adventure of building a new India."

Greeting and Farewell......the same today as in this 11th century carving from Khajuraho

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